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The Guardian

Burnham calls for consensus on 'urgent' fix for social care crisis

PM invites Lib Dem and
Tory leaders to meeting
today to explore solution

Pippa Crerar
Aletha Adu

Andy Burnham has promised "problem-solving, not point-scoring" before a speech on social care today in which he will set out his strategy for resolving one of the most intractable

issues in British politics. The prime minister has invited Kemi Badenoch, the Conservative leader, and Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey to discuss how to drive urgent reform on social care, as he attempts to find common ground across party lines.

It is understood that both leaders will be represented.

However, the suggestion that the main Westminster parties could finally reach consensus to fix the crisis that has eluded a generation of political leaders in England already appeared optimistic after the Tories

imposed their own red lines and amid negative headlines about inheritance tax.

Several Labour MPs also expressed concern over managing the financial burden of a reformed care sector.

Burnham said: "We need a different kind of politics: problem-solving, not point-scoring. Nowhere is that more urgent than social care. For decades, governments have kicked this issue down the road because they've seen it as too risky, too difficult, and too complicated.

"Politicians might have different

views but I'm serious about fixing this issue and to do that, we have to find common ground and listen to others to find a way forward. It's time to draw a line under people playing politics when the human cost of that means carers struggling, families paying the price and our NHS buckling under the strain."

Burnham is expected to stop short of revealing plans for a new system in this speech, instead confirming his intent, first revealed by the Guardian, to speed up the independent review led by Louise Casey that has

been considering possible options. Casey, who will launch the Big Conversation on Care today to give the public a chance to share views on the future of social care in England via an online platform, has warned that money alone won't fix the problem.

However, Burnham's push for a solution is set against a tightening economic backdrop, with the economic thinktank NIESR warning of "very difficult trade-offs" in the autumn budget if the Iran war keeps oil prices and inflation high. He is understood to

Deaths feared as 6.8 quake hits Japan

Rachel Hall

A 6.8-magnitude earthquake shook south Japan yesterday, leaving at least 100 people injured. Some were trapped and presumed dead inside a shopping centre.

The earthquake hit Kumamoto prefecture on the southern Kyushu island at 4.27pm local time, knocking out power to thousands of homes and damaging roads, bridges and buildings.

Japan's prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, told reporters authorities were still assessing the extent of the damage in the area, which was devastated by a deadly quake a decade ago.

"We have already been informed that people have been injured. Power outages and fires have occurred in some areas, and there has also been damage to roads and bridges and the collapse of buildings," Takaichi said. "I ask everyone to take action to protect themselves, including evacuating to a safe location."



Medal haul Joy for Wales and England at Commonwealth Games

Sport →

▲ Gymnast Ruby Evans, left, celebrates a first gold for Wales with England's bronze-winner Shantae-Eve Amankwaah

Tory MP's shots claim dismissed by France

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

When the Tory MP Chris Philp heard a volley of shots on the high seas and spun round to see a French gunship, he believed he was the victim of naval aggression – and updated his social media feed accordingly.

The reality, the French authorities said, appears to be more mundane: it was a routine Channel training exercise by officers who had no idea that the shadow home affairs spokesperson was present, or who he was in the first place.

Philp was being interviewed by the BBC on a fishing vessel a couple of miles off Boulogne yesterday when the French ship Flamant passed by at a distance of about 300 metres. As it did so, a French navy officer standing at the stern fired 17 shots from a handgun, aiming away from Philp.

Philp, who was being questioned about the small boats crisis, turned to the BBC interviewer, Michael Keohan, and said: "Is that towards us? I dunno."

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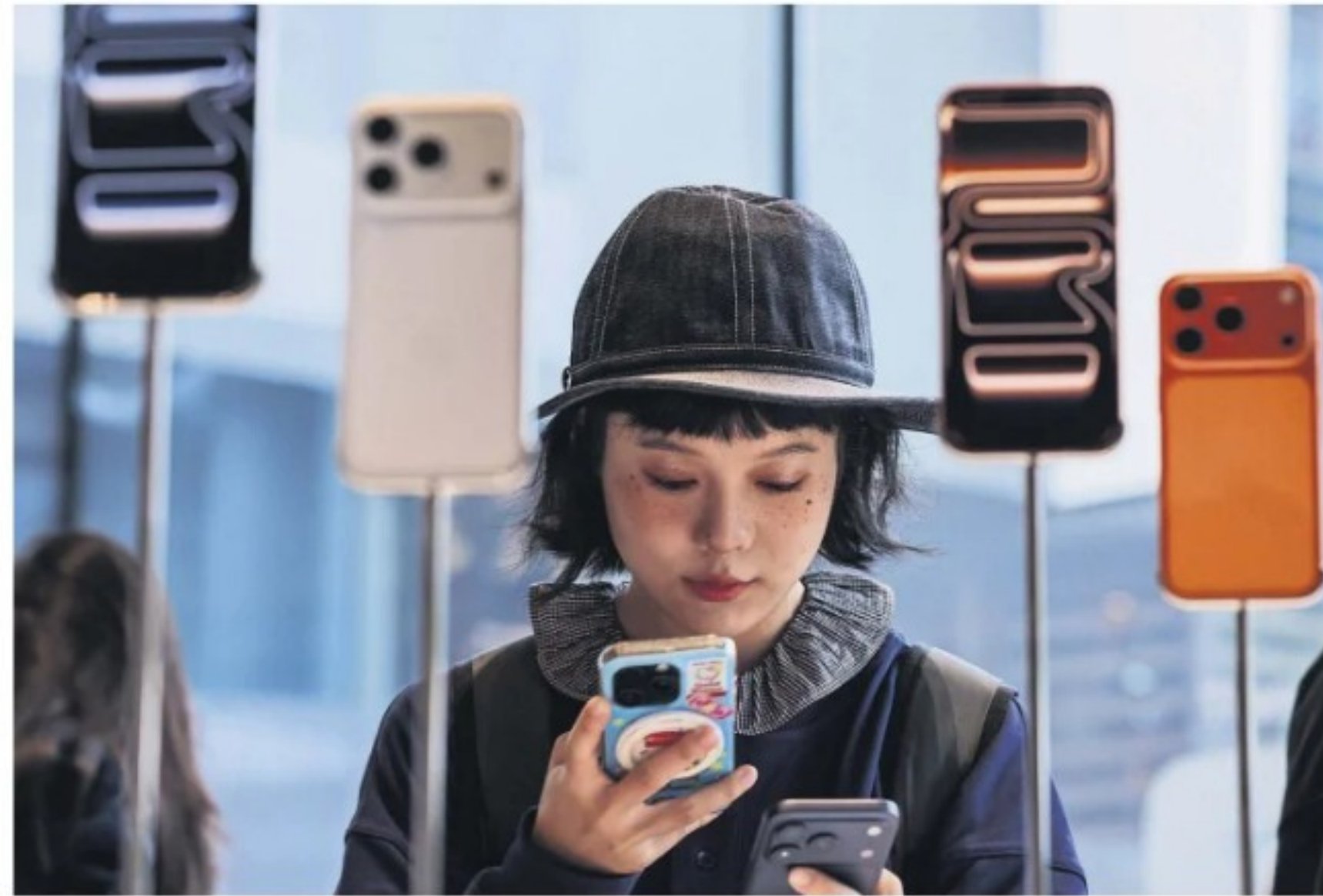
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News



◀ Apple's stock market strength has been linked to how it has invested less heavily in AI than some other tech companies

PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS/GETTY

Apple stock bears fruit as tech giant hits a \$5tn valuation for first time

Graeme Wearden

Apple has become only the second company to pass the \$5tn valuation mark, as it benefited from investors fleeing AI and semiconductor stocks amid a wider tech sell-off.

The iPhone maker's shares hit a session high of \$342.89 yesterday, giving it a market capitalisation of \$5.04tn (£3.78tn), then eased down to \$340.08 - around the \$5tn mark.

Apple became the world's most valuable company earlier this month, overtaking the chipmaking giant Nvidia, which had been at the top since June 2025 and became the first company ever to breach the \$5tn threshold last October.

The US consumer electronics company's rally has been driven as much by strong demand for its products as its decision to sit out the AI spending race that is sapping cashflows at big tech rivals.

Its fresh valuation high came amid an intensifying sell-off of AI stocks worldwide, with rising concern about how much AI companies are borrowing to fund datacentre expansion.

The Nasdaq 100 index of leading tech stocks fell by as much as 1.8% at one point, briefly taking into market correction territory with stocks more than 10% below their early June record high. They later rebounded to settle roughly flat on the day.

Meanwhile, South Korea's stock market slid to its lowest level since mid-April, with semiconductor



companies SK Hynix and Samsung Electronics falling by more than 10% during yesterday's trading session.

Analysts attributed the sell-off to renewed worries over AI expenditure and competition from cheaper Chinese rivals, after the Information reported that China had begun mass production of homegrown deep ultraviolet chip-making tools.

Investors may also be growing jittery about "circular funding" in the AI industry, which sees

artificial intelligence firms finance one another.

They have also been spooked by the announcement by Google last week that it was further increasing capital spending this year to as much as \$205bn to fund its AI plans, while reporting negative free cashflow for the first time in its history, burning through \$5.9bn in the three months to the end of June.

Apple has been partially shielded by being something of an AI laggard. Its difficulties in developing in-house models meant it has instead relied on Google's technology to power new services such as a revamped Siri. That has spared it the hefty infrastructure costs that have left big tech investors wary.

Apple's decision to hold iPhone prices steady last month when it unveiled increases for MacBooks and iPads has also bolstered demand as buyers scooped up the company's flagship device ahead of expected price hikes later this year, analysts have said.

To aid demand, Apple launched a device leasing programme in the US through the payments firm Klarna yesterday, under which monthly payments start at \$17.99 for an iPhone.

"Apple has resisted the AI spending race, betting that customer experience - not infrastructure investment - will ultimately determine the winners," said Dipanjan Chatterjee, vice-president and analyst at Forrester. The new leasing programme is a clever response: it doesn't reduce the price of an iPhone, but it changes how consumers perceive the cost by replacing sticker shock with a predictable monthly payment."

Including session gains, Apple stock has jumped 24% so far this year, widely outperforming the other six of the "Magnificent Seven" cohort of US technology stocks.

Apple is to report its third-quarter earnings after the market close on Wall Street tomorrow, with analysts expecting a more than 15% jump in revenue for the period compared with a year earlier.

AI stock sell-off escalates [Page 33](#) →

Royal Mail price increases to add millions to NHS costs

Joanna Partridge

Royal Mail will increase the price of its wholesale postal service by as much as a third in a multimillion-pound blow to the NHS and other large organisations.

The company has told customers who use its wholesale postal service for mail including marketing letters, household bills and medical appointment notices that it is raising prices by an average of 25% from 5 October.

The NHS spent at least £100m on sending letters by post in 2024, according to previous reports, meaning a 25% price increase could

result in several million pounds of additional cost.

The tariff increases will affect Royal Mail's bulk mail customers such as UK Mail, Whistl and Citi-post, which specialise in sorting and processing mail on behalf of big businesses such as banks and organisations including the NHS and HMRC.

Royal Mail is responsible for the final mile of this mail, which accounts for most of the letters sent in the UK. However, as many companies turn to email or social media to reach their customers, letter volumes are declining, raising the cost of the service.

"We understand that any price increase is difficult, particularly in the current economic environment," Royal Mail wrote in the letter, seen by the Guardian and signed by Richard Travers, the managing director for letters in the company's wholesale business.

"The financial challenge of maintaining the UK's nationwide postal network supported by 130,000 colleagues remains significant, and we are facing rising costs across our operation, including fuel and labour."

The letter said price increases were "necessary to ensure prices more accurately reflect the cost of providing a reliable, nationwide postal service".

The increases come as Royal Mail, owned since April 2025 by the Czech billionaire Daniel Křetínský, continues to fail to meet delivery targets set by the postal regulator.

Under most bulk mail contracts, the company is required to deliver the next day, though the postal service has regularly failed to meet targets for bulk mail and letters.

Ofcom launched an investigation into Royal Mail in June after almost a quarter of first-class mail arrived late in the year to March. The regulator has fined the company £37m since 2023 over a failure to meet delivery targets. It will also look into allegations from whistleblowers and

unions that Royal Mail is prioritising parcel delivery over letters, a practice the company denies.

The cost of sending a bulk mail letter weighing up to 100g using Royal Mail's access business economy service - for mail to be delivered within five days - will increase by 36.1%, while the cost of sending a large letter weighing between 101g and 250g using the standard access advertising mail service will rise by 11.4%.

Royal Mail said access business service volumes had fallen by almost a third this decade, from 6.3bn items sent each year in 2019-20 to about 4.2bn items currently. The company said it had to deliver to a growing number of UK addresses, now 32m.

A Royal Mail spokesperson said: "These changes relate to our access business customers who will continue to benefit from lower prices than equivalent consumer rates."

"Royal Mail made losses of almost £800m over the last four years and the company finances remain below the level that Ofcom considers compatible with a financially sustainable universal service."

25%

Average price increases to the Royal Mail's wholesale postal service, from 5 October this year

▼ Every day in August a visitor will be allowed into the stone circle - by themselves or with friends or family

PHOTOGRAPH: SAM FROST/THE GUARDIAN



'It has a presence' Visitors offered chance of time alone in the circle at Stonehenge

Steven Morris

Trips to Stonehenge can be a little hectic. Tens of thousands of people turn up every year to celebrate the summer and winter solstices, and even on a normal summer's day the area around the great stone circle is a place of bustle, excited conversation and selfie action.

But next month English Heritage is offering visitors the chance to win a little bit of guaranteed solitude within the hulking stones. Anyone who buys an advance ticket

will automatically be entered into a draw to have 20 minutes of alone time in the heart of the monument.

To mark the initiative, said to be the first of its kind since admission charges were introduced 125 years ago, the Guardian was granted 20 minutes in the circle yesterday morning to sample the solitude.

Usually, the circle is cordoned off with the sort of rope barrier used to section off VIP areas in nightclubs and visitors are only allowed to view the stones from a path. For the Guardian's visit, the Stonehenge supervisor Nick Morabito unhooked the rope shortly after 9am with a modest flourish to allow the rare access.

Rules remain - you can't touch the stones, lean on them or sit on them. But having time and space provides a little more time to appreciate the heft of the monument and also the details - the swirly, blotchy patterns the lichens on them create, the deep fissures, the thistles poking their way out from beneath some stones.

You can have a good look at carvings on the stones, including graffiti said to have been created by Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St Paul's Cathedral, whose family had a home nearby.

It was quiet but not silent. The A303 passes a few metres away but the traffic sound was a hum rather

than a roar and did not drown out the song of the skylarks, the bleat of the sheep and the warm, southerly breeze passing through what Thomas Hardy called the "temple of the winds". Most of all you have a few quiet minutes to wonder who built the monument and why - and, perhaps, what they would make of what the human race is up to 5,000 years on.

At 9.35am the spell was broken when the first shuttle bus between the visitor centre and the stones arrived. A German family speed-walked to the circle to be the first there. They were not allowed beyond the crowd control rope.

Morabito said that, while he

loved helping make sure visitors enjoyed the stones, he cherished the moments when he and fellow workers have a few minutes alone there. He said: "At the end of a busy summer's day it's lovely to sit in the circle for a few minutes and remember what it's all about."

A security officer, Ray Bulpitt, said he relished the tranquility of a night shift at the stones: "You hear the hares and sheep moving around." And occasionally an interloper trying to get unauthorised access. "We had a couple last night," he said. "We asked them to leave - no problems."

Georgia Butters, English Heritage's head of operations for Stonehenge, agreed that spending a little time in the stone circle was special. She said: "It is a spiritual place for many people but even if you're not spiritual in that way there's just something wonderful about the landscape - it has a presence, a stillness."

There are a few other ways to get solitary access to the stones. Being a world-famous figure is one. Barack Obama visited while he was US president during a trip to the UK for a Nato summit and the former astronaut Buzz Aldrin donned a Mars T-shirt when he popped by.

At solstices people are allowed into the circle for free. But they inevitably share the space with many others and the sounds of skylarks are drowned out by the banging of drums. For ordinary citizens the only way usually to get solitary time in the circle is to shell out the best part of £1,500 to buy an "explorer tour".

Butters said those who came out of the August draw would be allowed to take along other members of their party who had booked at the same time. But they could opt to go completely alone if they preferred. She said: "Everyone's different, aren't they? Some may want to run in and out of the stones, some may want to have a cup of tea there."

"They're massive stones and there's something about standing right next to one and getting the scale of them. It makes you think, how did people get these things here 5,000 years ago?"

Obviously, some will want to take pictures for social media. "That's fine," said Butters. "But I'd like to think that they'll just be able to just spend some time and have a moment of peace."

'It's not cricket': player appears to dupe umpire in clickgate row

Mark Brown

North of England correspondent

A row has erupted in the normally friendly, if ultra-competitive, world of English club cricket after footage went viral of alleged cheating.

The North Yorkshire and South Durham Cricket League has promised a full investigation in response to a complaint made after Saturday's division two match between Saltburn 2nd XI and Norton 2nd XI.

A video posted on social media shows a fielder apparently clicking his fingers as the batter goes for the ball. He has been accused of trying to trick the umpire into thinking the ball clipped the edge of the bat. The batter can be seen protesting to the umpire as Saltburn players celebrate.

Ben Mummery, who posted the video on social media, said it was "about the worst case of cheating I've ever seen in cricket". He added: "Apparently, their keeper has a huge amount of catches this season."

The incident has been nicknamed clickgate or, as it has been christened online, "Clicky Ponting" - a play on the name of the former Australian captain Ricky Ponting.

Mummery said he was pleased to see the video had gone viral. "I'm genuinely really happy it's being exposed," he said. "Harsh punishment please. It's not cricket."

The footage has been shared more than 3m times and has prompted a lively debate, with previous Saltburn scorecards being pored over by amateur internet sleuths.

Rory Cotterill, who captained Middlesbrough CC's 2nd XI in a 29-run defeat to Saltburn in June, said a similar situation occurred in that match. He shared a video allegedly showing

the same player clicking his fingers with commentators describing it as "scandalous".

In a statement, North Yorkshire and South Durham Cricket League said: "The league have received a formal complaint regarding alleged



▲ Cameron Bancroft, allegedly using sandpaper on his ball in 2018

incidents in a division two game on Saturday 25th July 2026.

"A full investigation has been initiated and until such time as the formal processes are complete no further comment will be made."

Saltburn won the game by 159 runs and are top of division 2 by 17 points. The club has been approached for comment.

Clickgate is far from the first alleged cheating scandal in cricket. One of the most infamous is sandpapergate: in a 2018 test match between Australia and South Africa, the Australian cricketer Cameron Bancroft was caught on camera trying to roughen a side of the ball with sandpaper - making it easier to swing, or curve the course of its flight.

Deaths feared as south Japan hit by quake of 6.8 magnitude

Continued from page 1

About 300,000 people were instructed to go to evacuation centres, the disaster management agency said. The areas with the biggest tremors will remain at risk of further strong quakes and landslides for about a week since the shallow earthquake is triggering active seismic activity, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

So far there have been more than 60 aftershocks ranging in magnitude from 1 to 4, the agency said. A tsunami warning was issued immediately after the quake, but was lifted within two hours.

One person was killed in south-west Japan when a house collapsed during the earthquake, Kyodo News reported.

Two hospitals reported more than 50 injuries each, including 10 in a serious condition, the public broadcaster NHK said.

"People are coming in with burns and fractures from being trapped under objects due to the earthquake, and ambulances are constantly bringing in injured people," NHK quoted one hospital employee as saying. "Inside the hospital, there are water leaks and electrical system failures."

Several people on a high-speed train at the time of the quake were also injured and several more were unaccounted for after a chimney collapsed at a Nippon Paper Industries factory, according to local media reports.

An explosion occurred in an Aeon shopping centre shortly after the earthquake, trapping "many people", fire services said. The broadcaster TBS reported that police said "quite a few" were presumed dead.

As night fell, regional officials said they believed 10 people were

unaccounted for in the shopping mall, the public broadcaster NHK reported. It earlier cited police as saying between 20 and 30 of the mall's employees could not be contacted.

Takaichi vowed late yesterday that emergency responders would work "tirelessly" through the night "starting with the rescue and lifesaving of those affected".

An Aeon spokesperson said customers and employees were evacuated after the initial quake and the cause of the explosion remained unclear. A government official subsequently told reporters that Aeon Kumamoto reported a gas leak, though it had not yet been determined as the cause.

Footage showed one side of the shopping centre, the prefecture's largest with about 200 stores, torn away, exposing steel beams and strewing debris across the neighbouring car park. Several ambulances and fire engines were parked outside as rescue teams searched for survivors.

Footage from NHK showed several other buildings on fire or partly collapsed, along with large fissures appearing on major roads, including an elevated highway. TSMC, the world's largest contract chip maker, Sony and Fujifilm evacuated workers from their factories in the area.

Chiharu Hara, a 35-year-old recruitment agent who was in Kumamoto, told Agence France-Presse she was "terrified" when the quake struck. "The office swayed violently side to side. I was afraid it would collapse. Everyone panicked," she said.

The quake's epicentre was about 12 miles (20km) south of Kumamoto, central Kyushu island's largest city, with a population of about 700,000. The US Geological Survey initially said the earthquake had a magnitude of 7.1, but revised it to 6.8. The tremor had a magnitude of 7.1, the JMA said, but reached the highest level of 7 on Japan's shindo scale. A subsequent aftershock with a magnitude of 6.1 was registered at 5.08pm.

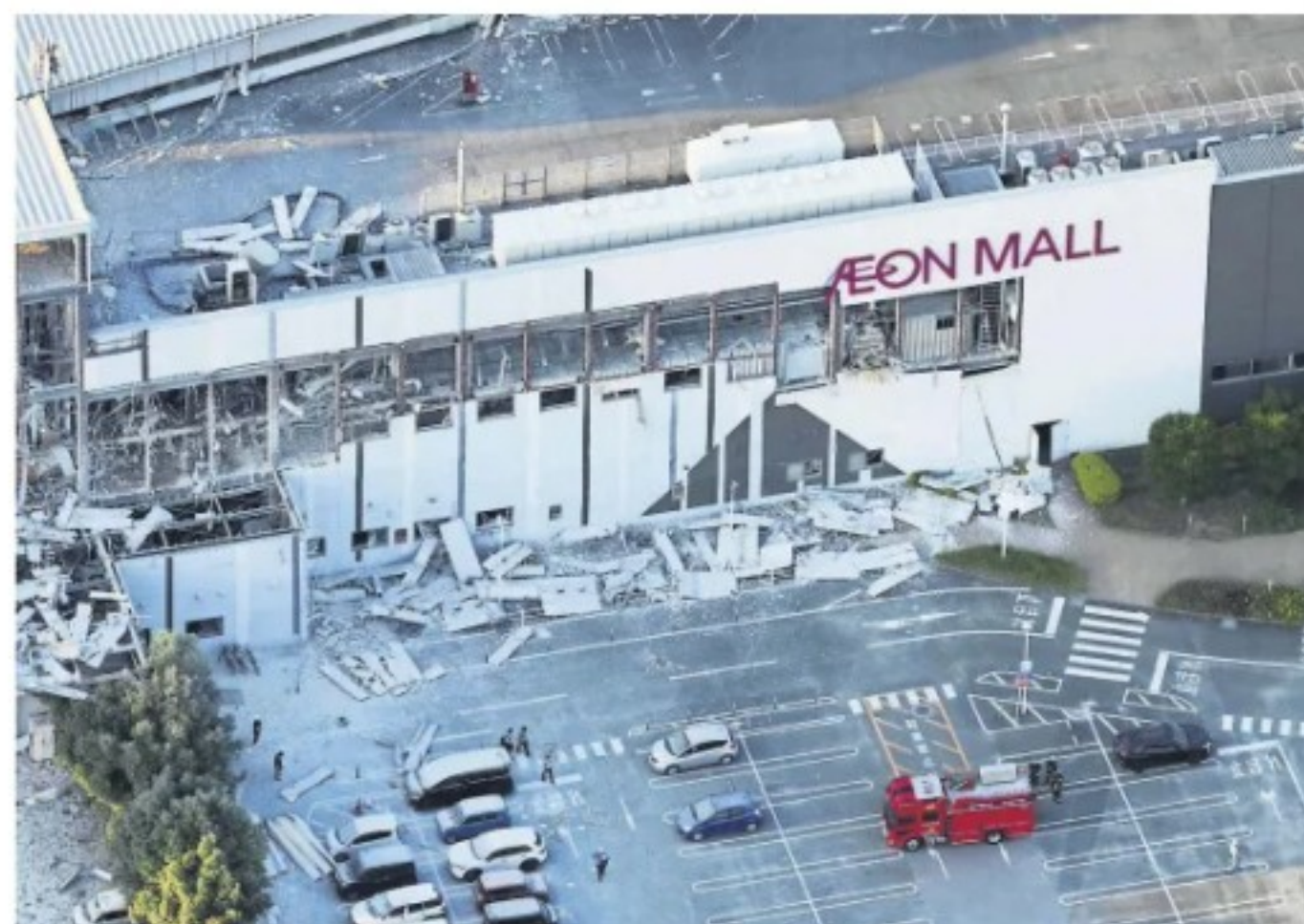
Japan, which is located along the "ring of fire" of volcanoes and oceanic trenches in the Pacific basin, is one of the world's most earthquake-prone countries, with minor tremors every few minutes. The country accounts for about 20% of the world's earthquakes of magnitude 6 or more.

The massive earthquake in Kumamoto 10 years ago killed 275 people and injured a further 2,739. It damaged thousands of buildings including the city's castle, a popular tourist site. Some of the castle's stone walls are said to have been damaged in the most recent quake.



◀ A bridge in Yatsushiro in Kumamoto prefecture on Japan's Kyushu island. Below, damage to housing, Nippon Paper Industries and the Aeon mall in Kashima

PHOTOGRAPHS: KYODO NEWS/AP

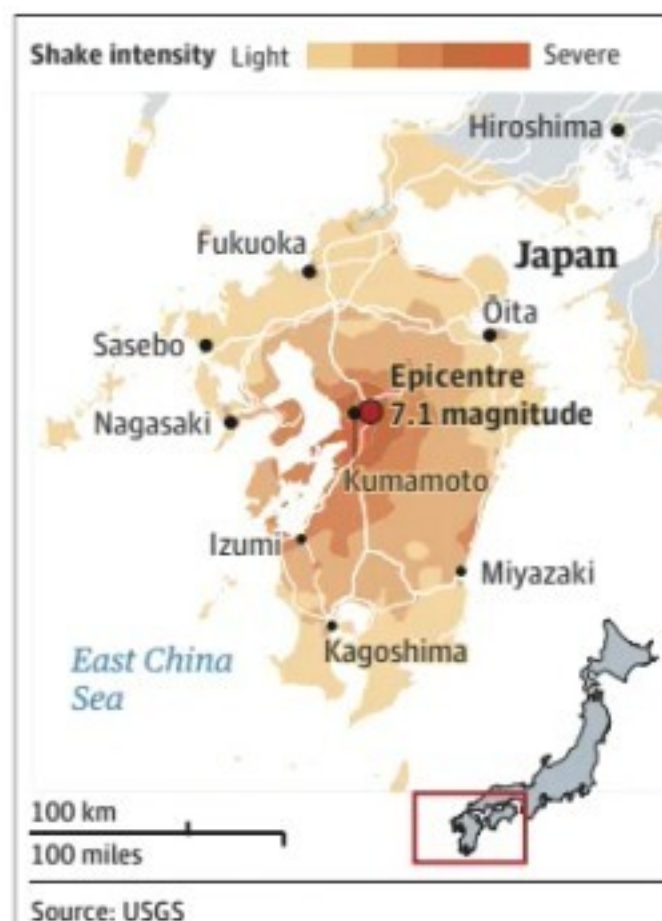


Kyushu Electric Power said 48,000 homes had lost power, while the railway company JR Kyushu suspended services. Kumamoto airport also shut its runway as airlines diverted and cancelled flights.

The telecoms operators KDDI and NTT Docomo said there was disruption to their mobile phone services owing to power shortages and transmission-line failures. There were no irregularities reported at nuclear power stations, Japan's nuclear regulation authority said.

The Japanese military has mobilised 3,600 personnel for disaster relief operations and sent 20 aircraft to assess the damage from the air, the defence minister said.

Additional reporting AFP



Derbyshire delight
White storks return
after 600 years

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Developing cobwebs?
Latest Spider-Man
does just enough

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National



Wait for the drop ... The celebrity chef Jamie Oliver fumbles his 'summer cocktail cake' while attempting to transfer it from a cooling rack to a plate during yesterday's live broadcast of ITV's *This Morning* as the programme's presenters Alison Hammond and Dermot O'Leary look on. 'Sorry, I messed up,' Oliver said as the sponge cake fell to pieces. 'But here's one I made earlier.'



PHOTOGRAPH:
ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Black people seeing faster rise in risk of stroke, research finds

Tobi Thomas

Health and inequalities
correspondent

Stroke risk factors including high blood pressure and diabetes are rising faster among people from Black African and Caribbean backgrounds compared with their white counterparts, according to analysis.

Researchers at King's College London analysed data from more than 8,500 adults over a 30-year period from the South London Stroke Register, one of the longest-running population-based stroke studies in the world.

The study found that while the prevalence of stroke risk factors, including diabetes and hypertension, were increasing faster among Black people, people from Black African backgrounds were also twice as likely to experience stroke without a prior

risk factor diagnosis than white people, at a rate of 12% compared with 6%. About one in six people across the UK will have a stroke in their lifetime.

Diabetes was about twice as common in Black Caribbean and Black African people on the stroke register compared with white participants, and high blood pressure was 29% more prevalent in Black Caribbean and 47% more prevalent in Black African people. Although diabetes rates increased for all ethnic groups over the 30-year study period, they increased most rapidly among Black African participants, rising from 21% between 1995 and 2004 to 41% between 2015 and 2024.

Dr Eva Emmett, a research fellow at King's College London and the lead author of the study, said: "Our study shows that the prevalence of pre-stroke hypertension and diabetes is higher and increasing faster in

ethnic minority and lower socioeconomic groups. Together with Black people's younger age at stroke and higher likelihood of having a stroke without a prior risk factor diagnosis, these findings call for targeted and earlier primary prevention efforts.

"NHS health checks, which screen for hypertension and diabetes, begin at the age of 40. However, this may be too late for higher-risk groups who often experience stroke at a younger age."

Emmett called for "universal improvements in cardiovascular risk detection" as well as more targeted prevention strategies, such as a younger screening age for those most at risk.

The data also revealed socioeconomic disparities among the study's participants. The prevalence of diabetes was 23% higher in participants with manual occupations, such as bus drivers, security guards and

plumbers, compared with those in non-manual employment such as teachers and nurses. Diabetes prevalence was also 21% higher in those with lower education levels.

While diabetes diagnoses increased in all socioeconomic groups over time, the greatest increases were seen in those with routine and manual jobs and with lower education levels. Similarly, high blood pressure rates increased the most in those with lower socioeconomic status.

Dr Maëva May, the director of policy at the Stroke Association, said the findings were a stark reminder that "the benefits of prevention are not being felt equally".

She added: "Too many people from Black African and Black Caribbean communities, and those living in more deprived circumstances, are developing stroke risk factors earlier and are experiencing stroke before those risks have even been identified."

"Stroke is not inevitable. Many strokes can be prevented by finding and treating conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes early, but that only works if people can access the right care at the right time. Preventing stroke means preventing inequalities in who gets the opportunity to stay well."

Slower trains and timetable changes as hot, dry conditions hit rail travel

Rob Davies

Persistent drought conditions caused by the climate crisis are expected to cause further disruption to train services across England as the lack of rainfall affects the ground supporting railway embankments.

Yesterday South Western Railway (SWR) became the latest large rail company to unveil timetable changes and reduced speeds to cope with the effects of hot and dry weather.

From Monday 10 August, trains between Yeovil and Exeter St Davids will be reduced to one every two hours. Passengers travelling between London Waterloo and Exeter are also being advised to allow extra time to complete their journeys, which are expected to take up to 27 minutes longer.

The move comes after operators in the east of England said they were going to take similar steps. Affected routes include those run by Great Northern in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, by Greater Anglia and c2c in Essex, and the eastern end of the Elizabeth line from London.

The moves are in response to "soil moisture deficit" caused by spring's unusually low rainfall followed by hot, dry summer weather as the UK enters its fourth heatwave of the year.

Many sections of Britain's railway network are built on embankments of clay soil, which usually contain a lot of water. Long periods of drought reduce the volume of moisture in the soil, causing it to shrink, which in turn disturbs the ground that tracks are built on, causing sleepers to drop or move out of position.

Even relatively small changes in track geometry mean trains must reduce their speed to run safely.

Lawrence Bowman, the managing director of SWR and Network Rail Wessex, said: "Extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common, and this is the second year in a row that prolonged hot, dry weather has affected our network."

"Since last summer's intervention, we've invested in strengthening the route, carried out extensive work to the track and embankments, and developed a plan that customers can rely on."

Network Rail said its engineers had reduce the effects of dried-out soil by using machines called tampers to lift the track, push stone ballast underneath and create a solid foundation so that trains could run smoothly. New ballast has also been put down to help raise the level of the track.



▲ Campers prepare to evacuate a campsite due to a wildfire near Lacanau, Gironde region, south-west France yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: ALAIN JOCARD/AFP/GETTY

Thousands are evacuated from holiday areas as Spain and France battle wildfires

Angela Giuffrida
Ajit Niranjan

Nearly 4,000 people had been evacuated from tourist sites on France's Atlantic coast by yesterday evening as the return of winds and extreme heat jeopardised firefighters' battles to contain wildfires raging in both France and Spain.

The precautionary evacuation order in France, which covered campsites, holiday villages and other tourist accommodation around the resort of Lacanau to the west of Bordeaux, exacerbated a wildfire emergency described by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, as the "toughest" situation the country had dealt with since the second world war.

On a visit to a crisis centre in Bordeaux yesterday, Macron warned that "the coming weeks will be tough and we have to hold out".

In Spain, meanwhile, a woman who had been injured in a wildfire in the southern province of Almeria earlier this month died in hospital, bringing the number of fatalities from that blaze to 14.

The woman, who was not named, died at Seville's Virgen del Rocío university hospital where she had been treated since suffering severe injuries in the wildfire, a hospital

spokeswoman told Agence France-Presse without giving further details.

In France, Rémi Lassourelle, a fire commander in the Gironde department, was quoted by Le Monde as saying that the blaze there, which has destroyed 42,000 hectares (104,000 acres) of forest, was "relatively under control", although firefighters feared a "potential flare-up of the fire on its north-west flank towards Lacanau". "That is why we decided to evacuate the campsites," he said.

Other large fires have been contained in the nearby Landes, where thousands of evacuees were allowed to return home, and the Écrins massif in the French Alps, although one in the Gros Bessillon massif in the Var area of south-east France had not been fully brought under control last night.

Wildfires in France, Spain and Italy have forced the evacuation of about 330,000 people over the past week, with Spain entering Europe's fourth intense heatwave of the summer attempting to contain some of the worst forest fires in its history.

The Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said the country faced "difficult hours, complex hours" with a new heatwave forecast to begin today, and warned of the urgent need to respond to the climate emergency.

He later said authorities were beginning to "see light at the end of

the tunnel in the fight against wildfires". In a rare piece of good news, Spain's interior ministry announced the end of evacuation orders for 15 municipalities yesterday.

A fire in the hilly terrain of Ávila, west of Madrid, became Spain's largest on record, burning 50,000 hectares.

A firefighter, Javier García, told Associated Press he had never faced anything like it in his two decades protecting rural communities.

"This doesn't have a precedent," he said, adding that the ferocity of the wildfire was forcing firefighters to fundamentally change their tactics by prioritising evacuations and property protection because of the danger from fast-moving flames and blazes too powerful to attack directly. "The evolution is alarming," García said.

An EU spokesperson, Anna-Kaisa Ikonen, said a number of firefighting planes and helicopters from member countries had been deployed to France and Spain.

She said it was "important to clarify that no country can maintain alone all the resources that are needed to tackle every possible natural or other disaster and crisis".

EU officials said wildfires could still be burning until early November in what threatens to be a record-breaking year for burnt land area.

Wildfire weather across the bloc

has been more severe this year than ever before, according to data up to 22 July from the European Forest Fire Information System. In France, which had broken its full-year record for burnt area by then, and in Spain, the cumulative numbers of fires in 2026 have also set new records.

European wildfires have struck at the same time as ferocious North American ones, with hundreds of blazes continuing to devastate the western US and swathes of Canada. Meanwhile, torrential rains have flooded countries across Asia.

"The climate alarm is blaring, from every direction," Simon Stiell, the executive secretary of UN Climate Change, said yesterday. With Europe now facing another heatwave, he said the human and economic costs of the climate crisis were reaching "national emergency" levels. He said: "These spiralling disasters are now the lived reality for billions in a world getting rapidly hotter, as humanity moves too slowly from fossil fuels to clean energy and to protect forests."

Western Europe had had a wet winter and also, in some parts, a wet spring, which encouraged heavy plant growth. It has been followed by a dangerously hot and dry summer, with back-to-back heatwaves forcing moisture from plants and leaving behind a surplus of fuel that has fed the flames.

The climatic drivers have been made worse by the long-running abandonment of farmland that used to fragment the landscape, preventing small fires from growing into blazing infernos.

"If the issue of fuel load isn't addressed, I think we're going to have to get used to [fires too strong to put out]," said Dr Jesús Notario del Pino, a soil scientist at the University of La Laguna in Tenerife. "As many forestry specialists and engineers often say: what we don't manage, the fire will."

Dr Thomas Smith, a wildfire scientist at the London School of Economics, said: "If I was holidaying on the coast of Spain or the south of France, I would make sure I have any fire alerts or fire weather apps installed on my phone and familiarise myself with the evacuation plans for the hotel or residence."

He added: "It's very important to understand that timely evacuation saves lives."

The June heatwave would have been "virtually impossible" without the added heat from more than a century of carbon pollution, a rapid analysis found last month, while the level of soil dryness in western Europe was made five times more likely by climate breakdown, according to a separate study from the same international research network last week.



▼ A man inspects damage caused by a wildfire in La Vall d'Uixó, Castellon province, Spain, yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: EVA MANEZ/REUTERS



▼ Firefighters attempt to suppress a wildfire near Arès in Gironde province, south-west France

PHOTOGRAPH: BAZ RATNER/REUTERS



Analysis Oliver Milman



The skies will clear of smoke, but past experience tells us the toll on people will last for years

A spate of ferocious wildfires across North America and Europe, worsened by the climate crisis, have incinerated homes and forests and forced thousands of people to flee. Previous fires suggest the effects may linger for years.

The current fires and their plumes of smoke can appear to be a temporary, if immediate, crisis. Nearly 1,000 fires have sprung into life in the boreal forests of Canada, causing the evacuation of towns, and toxic smoke to waft into big Canadian and US cities, prompting threats of retribution from Donald Trump, who bizarrely accused Canada of "poisoning" his country's air.

Smoke is billowing from wildfires in the US too, amid the third major heatwave of the past month, which has further dried out parched vegetation. Vast, lightning-sparked fires across Washington, eastern Oregon and Idaho have caused a plume of smoke so large that it could reach Florida.

In Europe, huge fires have gripped parts of the UK, France and Spain, causing the evacuation of more than 250,000 people.

The climate crisis, caused by the burning of fossil fuels, is known to be creating more fire-prone conditions around the world by drying out soils and plants. "The entire Iberian peninsula is suffering the effects of the climate emergency in

a very specific way," said Pedro Sánchez, Spain's prime minister.

Scientists have also long been aware of the unhealthy consequences of wildfire smoke, which can trigger severe respiratory and cardiac problems. A recent study found that exposure to tiny particles carried in wildfire smoke will raise the risk of hospitalisation for older people hundreds of miles away from fires.

"The cardiovascular toll of wildfire smoke reaches well beyond the fire lines and well beyond the day the sky turns orange," said Kai Chen, associate professor of epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health and the study co-author.

But identifying the effects of wildfires long after they have been extinguished has been a more recent undertaking. There are continuing problems in Maui, the second largest of Hawaii's islands, three years after wildfires there caused more than 100 deaths and razed several thousand buildings, a new report highlights.

While living and economic conditions have generally improved since the fires, many people in Maui are still struggling with health problems such as poorer lung functions, higher blood pressure and poor mental health, according to the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study, led by researchers at the University of Hawaii and released on Monday.

"The progress is real, and it should be recognised," said Alike Maunakea, co-director of the study

and a school of medicine professor at the University of Hawaii. "But the biological, emotional and social consequences of a disaster do not disappear on the same timeline as debris removal or reconstruction."

Nearly half of all adults in the Maui study continued to report depressive symptoms, with nearly one in five experiencing post-traumatic stress. The study of more than 2,500 participants also found severe depressive symptoms and post-traumatic stress increased among children and adolescents, as did blood pressure readings and obesity levels.

"Children may appear resilient while still carrying significant emotional and physical effects beneath the surface," said Christopher Knightsbridge, a mental health therapist based in Lahaina, a coastal town that was largely destroyed by the fires.

"Supporting children means supporting the entire family, including their housing, food security, daily routines and access to trusted care," he added.

The researchers stressed that long-term monitoring and intervention is required after a major wildfire event because of effects that can last for years. While the skies over North America and Europe will eventually clear, this climate change-driven era of wildfire will exact a lengthy toll.

As well as better support for those directly affected by fires, experts say authorities in smoke-affected areas could respond to the threat of repeated smoke exposure by creating "clean air centres" that people can flee to in order to escape smoke and other air pollutants.

A research paper from last year, which found a 7% increase in mortality among a cohort of older people living in southern California over a three-year period because of wildfire smoke exposure, recommended that "activation of public health measures such as clean air centres should not only depend on intensity of smoke, as the long-term effects can be harmful, even at low levels".



▲ A helicopter collects water from a pool yesterday in Casillas, Ávila province, Spain. Right, Spanish firefighters in Sotillo de Adrada in the same region

PHOTOGRAPH: PABLO BLAZQUEZ DOMINGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES



Speedboat killer pleads guilty to violently attacking girlfriend

PA Media

Speedboat killer Jack Shepherd has pleaded guilty to violently assaulting his girlfriend, including attacking her with barbecue tongs.

The 38-year-old pleaded guilty yesterday to two counts of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and damaging property.

The assaults happened in February and June last year and led to Shepherd's recall to prison.

He was jailed for 10 years for manslaughter in 2018 over the death of 24-year-old Charlotte Brown when his speedboat crashed during a first date.

Shepherd skipped his Old Bailey trial while on the run in Georgia before eventually being extradited to the UK to serve his sentence.

He was released on licence in January 2024 but faced a recall to prison in September last year after being accused of violence towards a new partner.

At Isleworth crown court yesterday, Shepherd pleaded guilty to three offences after prosecutors agreed to drop two other allegations, of controlling or coercive behaviour and intentional suffocation.



▲ Jack Shepherd was jailed in 2018 over the death of Charlotte Brown

Shepherd entered his guilty pleas by a video link from HMP Swaleside in Kent.

He admitted pinning the woman down and punching her in February 2025, striking her in the chest with barbecue tongs in June 2025 and damaging her keys that same month.

Judge Martin Edmunds KC, the recorder of Kensington and Chelsea, remanded Shepherd in custody until a sentencing hearing on 4 September.

According to a prosecution summary of the case, he started dating the woman, who is in her 50s, in August 2024, but towards the end of the year she accused him of being abusive and threatening.

In February 2025, Shepherd admitted pinning down the woman and "punching her several times, causing bruising to her arm and top of leg" during an argument.

In the second incident, in June 2025, Shepherd got angry with his partner for burning a pizza during a barbecue, and "proceeded to hit her with the barbecue tongs on her left breast which caused a permanent scar".

She also accused him of "belittling" her with jibes about her weight and age, and accused her of flirting with other men.

At his manslaughter trial, the court heard that Shepherd, a web developer, met Brown for a first date and offered to take her on a ride along the River Thames in his speedboat.

They had both been drinking champagne, and Shepherd handed the controls of the boat to Brown shortly before it struck a submerged tree and overturned, tipping them into the cold water.

He was plucked from the Thames alive, but Brown was found unconscious and unresponsive.



▲ Three juvenile white storks explore their enclosure in Willington Wetlands in Derbyshire yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME GREEN

'A milestone': Derbyshire welcomes first white storks in 600 years

Graeme Green

A long orange beak poked curiously out from its crate, followed by a sleek head and slender body. Then the first white stork of the morning flapped its wings and took the air. Moments later, a second emerged tentatively to stalk through the long grass, followed closely by a final sibling, which stretched its wings and explored the length of the enclosure.

The juvenile white storks had just arrived at their new home in Derbyshire's Willington Wetlands, and conservationists are hopeful their

presence will kickstart the return of the birds to the Midlands after an absence of more than 600 years.

"It feels absolutely incredible," said Katie Last of Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, who manages the nature reserve. "To see white storks back at Willington feels like a real milestone. We've put years of work into restoring this landscape. I'm over the moon with how it all went."

"Our next aim is to get to the point where they're a sustainable population and they can live outside, flying around and people can see them moving through the landscape."

White storks disappeared across Derbyshire and the Midlands around the 14th century. Sightings have increased in the region but none have stayed to breed. The hope is that the trio - one male, one female and one of yet-to-be-determined sex - will act as a "magnet flock" to encourage wild birds to settle and breed.

"White storks seek safety in numbers, so it's been proved that white storks will settle around other white storks," Last said. "We've got wild white storks migrating over from Africa. We've had white storks

recorded in nearby Matlock and Ashbourne, so this is the perfect opportunity. We'll also be putting platforms up in existing trees to give birds space and encourage nesting."

Over time, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust hopes to manage releases from the purpose-built enclosure into the reserve. The first pair will be carefully monitored. Depending on how they settle and progress, more birds may be shipped into the reserve in future.

"Our long-term hope is that white storks become part of the Midlands landscape once again, but success is about much more than one species," said Rachel Bennett, the director of wilder landscapes and wilder communities at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. "Success means thriving wetlands, more wildlife across the landscape, and communities that feel connected to nature and invested in its future."

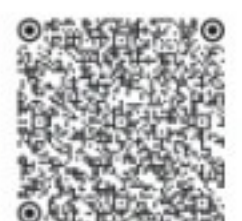
The £309,000 project has been funded by the Veolia Environmental Trust through the Landfill Communities Fund. "This whole project is about more than the return of an iconic bird," said Last. "It's about reigniting people's sense of wonder in nature."

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RootMetrics



Netflix's KPop Demon Hunters, far left, reached an audience of 24 million and Adolescence, below, reached 16 million. But the BBC made a comeback with The Traitors, left, and The Night Manager, below

PHOTOGRAPH: NETFLIX/AP/BBC/INK FACTORY/DES WILLIE



Adolescence or The Traitors? Netflix equals BBC as British viewers' default

Dan Milmo
Global technology editor

Netflix is neck-and-neck with the BBC as the default service Britons turn to when they switch on their TV, according to research.

The home of Adolescence and KPop Demon Hunters is now the first port of call for 26% of viewers, Ofcom found. The national broadcaster is narrowly behind, as the go-to for

25% of audiences. Although growth in streaming platforms has slowed in the UK, Netflix in particular is still producing breakthrough hits with audiences.

Ofcom's annual Media Nations report showed the hit film Kpop Demon Hunters and the crime drama Adolescence were the most watched in the UK last year, with the former reaching an audience of more than 24 million; the latter 16 million.

The Netflix app comes with many

streaming devices but users still need to pay for a subscription to watch it.

However, Ofcom said viewing figures for the start of 2026 showed the BBC mounting a fightback, with the latest series of The Traitors and Tom Hiddleston's return to the Night Manager topping the ratings.

That trend has continued into the summer thanks to the coverage of the World Cup. England's World Cup semi-final defeat to Argentina on 15 July attracted a peak audience

26%

Proportion of viewers who use Netflix as their first port of call when watching TV, Ofcom found

25%

Proportion of viewers whose go-to service when they switch on the TV is the BBC, research shows

of 24 million viewers across BBC platforms. Kate Davies, the group director for strategy and research at Ofcom, said traditional broadcasters were showing "resilience" through their live and event TV programming.

Describing the competitive landscape between the likes of the BBC, Sky and Google-owned YouTube as "fierce", she added: "To thrive and survive in the current media landscape, it's more important than ever for companies to continue to understand changing audience habits."

Citing another set of data from the audience measurement body Barb, Ofcom said the BBC remained ahead of other platforms in terms of share of total video viewing, accounting for 18% of the total in 2025, followed by YouTube on 15%, ITV on 11% and Netflix on 9%.

YouTube is also becoming more of a fixture of TV viewing, with the amount it is watched on TV sets doubling over the past four years.

There were also signs of a drop off among young audiences, with steep declines in live TV viewing among 16- to 24-year-olds and four-to-15-year-olds of 17% each, although Ofcom said this was partly due to the absence of major sporting events in 2025, compared with the boost from the Paris Olympics and Euro 2024.

But alternative video viewing services were not necessarily the beneficiaries from the decline of young viewership numbers for broadcasters. Ofcom said young adults continue to watch TV less and less, due to the allure of alternatives such as social media and gaming.

A BBC spokesperson said: "We are already transforming the BBC's content and services to meet changing audience habits, including through our YouTube partnership."

'An opportunity too good to pass up' Munchetty to swap BBC Breakfast for radio role

Naga Munchetty is to leave BBC Breakfast after 17 years on the flagship morning television news programme to co-present Radio 5 Live's breakfast show.

Munchetty, who has presented the station's weekday mid-morning programme since 2021, will move to 5 Live Breakfast alongside a new co-host, the BBC said.

The current breakfast hosts, Rachel Burden and Rick Edwards, announced yesterday that they would step down in December.

The move comes after reports that Munchetty had faced allegations of bullying on the breakfast TV show. There has

been no suggestion her move and the allegations are connected.

Munchetty said: "I'm thrilled to be joining 5 Live Breakfast in January. Live news, great conversations and connecting with audiences are what I love most about broadcasting, and 5 Live does all of that brilliantly."

"It has been a privilege to be part of the BBC Breakfast TV team, working alongside an incredibly talented and hard-working group of journalists who are not only outstanding colleagues but also great friends."

"Presenting a flagship programme on 5 Live is an opportunity that was simply too

good to pass up. It will take a huge amount of work and require 100% of my focus and energy, and I'm really looking forward to throwing myself into the role."

Burden will move to the weekday mid-morning show, while Edwards will continue to front Fighting Talk on Saturdays.

Munchetty earned between £360,000 and £364,999 in the 2025-26 financial year, it was revealed this month.

The BBC has been contacted for comment, but at the time that the bullying allegations were reported it said: "We do not comment on individual HR matters." **Jamie Grierson**



Naga Munchetty moves to Radio 5 Live in January

Vital young people engage with work support scheme, says McFadden

Jessica Elgot

Deputy political editor

Young people will be expected to engage with new support to find work, Pat McFadden has said, as he announced that parents receiving benefits could get £4,500 a year if their child starts apprenticeship.

Speaking to the Guardian, the work and pensions secretary echoed the comments of Andy Burnham when he suggested that access to support would be conditional on young people properly participating in it. To help with that, the new funds announced would stop families losing benefits when teenagers take up apprenticeships.

"We have an obligation to put good support in place," McFadden said. "And then there is an expectation that people engage with the support."

One of the few ministers to keep his job in the reshuffle when Burnham became prime minister, he said the new apprenticeship bursary would compensate for a quirk in the system that could mean families lose some benefits if a teenager takes up an apprenticeship. That penalty - where the family loses the child component of universal credit - is most likely to affect single parents or disabled teenagers under 18.

McFadden said that welfare reform would mean both "opportunities and expectations". He said: "We are trying to get the system to ask: 'How do we help you live your fullest life? How do we maximise your opportunities?'"

"One of the things that struck me about the benefits system is how sticky it is, how when people get on to these long-term benefits they tend to stay in them for a long time."

The bursaries of about £4,500 will be offered to families - particularly single parents with a disabled child - who could otherwise lose about £80 a week because the apprenticeship salary - £258 a week - is lower than the £340 a week in lost benefits.

Burnham is seeking to address the crisis of mounting unemployment among young people and said yesterday he would aim to implement fundamental changes in the education system to emphasise technical

and vocational skills, especially those relevant to local businesses.

Both Burnham and McFadden have said they are determined to reform the welfare system, especially by providing more opportunities for young people on long-term sickness benefits to return to the workforce.

The prime minister also said on Monday he wanted to make some of the support "conditional upon people taking opportunities that are presented in front of them".

McFadden said the bursary was part of removing those unintended barriers to young people taking up work - £30m funded through the current departmental budget - but added it was crucial that young people responded to the support on offer.

"The key to it is to remove this barrier to opportunity really," he said. "And to stop people being trapped in the benefit system when they would otherwise take up an opportunity which is in their interest, which would put them on to the next step of a career path."

Burnham has said he wanted to avoid "crude cuts to benefits to get the welfare bill down ... Often that just pushes people into even more crisis and then even more public spending in another part of the system."

McFadden said there would be a significant system redesign when the second stage of a report from the social security minister, Stephen Timms, and disability campaigners is published in the autumn. An interim report has already found the criteria for personal independence payments were not fit for purpose.

He said: "We'll need a whole government response, not just a [Department for Work and Pensions] response, because the issues affecting young people go way beyond the boundaries of the DWP."

The government is also expected to receive the second part of Alan Milburn's review this autumn, looking at growing youth unemployment.

Charities have welcomed plans for the bursary but said young people needed to be made aware of its existence by potential employers.

Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the social justice charity Nacro, said: "If more young people are to take up apprenticeships, it is vital their family isn't worse off so introducing a new bursary is a welcome step towards narrowing the income gap."

"As the new scheme is rolled out, the government must ensure it is as easy as possible for young people to apply, and that nobody loses out because they were not directed towards support."



'Very impressed' PM's technical training plan wins broad support

Sally Weale

Education correspondent

Andy Burnham's plans to put academic and technical education routes on an equal footing in England have been welcomed by many, but none were more enthusiastic than the former Tory minister Kenneth Baker.

"I'm very impressed with what he has said," the 91-year-old former education secretary, home secretary and chair of the Tories told the Guardian. "It's a very significant announcement. I'm going to try to persuade the Conservative party to support this."

Lord Baker and Burnham may seem strange bedfellows. They belong to different generations

and they support different political parties. But at a time when 1 million 16- to 24-year-olds are not in employment, education or training (Neets), they share a vision for a school system in which technical and vocational skills are as valued as academic qualifications.

The new prime minister's plans for schools to develop technical and vocational courses for students aged 14 and above, which are responsive to the local jobs market, are based in part on the Greater Manchester baccalaureate he introduced as the region's mayor in 2023. The inspiration for Burnham's MBacc, however, lies in Baker's longstanding vision for high-quality vocational and technical education delivered via university technical colleges, or UTCs.

First introduced by the coalition government in 2010, UTCs are state

schools for 14- to 19-year-olds, funded by the government, which work with local employers and universities to deliver a specialist technical education alongside core curriculum subjects.

Baker is the president of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, which oversees England's 44 UTCs. They have faced significant challenges in the past - some have struggled with recruitment, a number have closed and Ofsted inspections have not always been positive - but if success is measured by how few pupils end up Neet, they look like a success.

According to Baker, UTCs today have the lowest level of youth unemployment of any group of schools - less than 5%, compared with 16.4% in state secondary schools. "I'm very proud of the fact that last year half of our schools had no unemployment," said Baker. "Every student went on to further education, or a university or a job. It's an exceptional achievement."

Critically, Burnham has identified that the key to success is starting a technical route at 14, said Baker. "It's too late to do it at 16."

In what could be a blueprint for the new Burnham vision, Walney School in Barrow-in-Furness will this September introduce an

'We are trying to get the system to ask: "How do we help you live your fullest life?"'

Pat McFadden Work
and pensions secretary

▼ **Andy Burnham visits Alstom Transport in Derby to launch plans for new technical educational routes**

PHOTOGRAPH: TEMILADE ADELAJA/PA



employer-led technical education pathway – a UTC “sleeve” within the school – to equip young people with the skills for high-quality careers in healthcare and engineering and help local employers tackle skills shortages.

In order to make this happen on a national scale, classrooms will have to be converted into workshops. In one UTC with a health specialism, some of the rooms have been converted into a hospital ward and a pharmacy. The costs could be high. School leaders and teaching unions, reading about Burnham’s plans, are worried about the lack of detail and funding. Budgets are already tight and school leaders are grappling with an avalanche of changes to the curriculum, inspections and special needs.

“Currently, schools are under significant and increasing financial pressure,” said Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the NASUWT. “They are being asked to do even more with even less. No successful and sustainable package of change is deliverable in such circumstances and the prime minister must take action to invest in education if the aims of this announcement are to become a reality.”

Others are worried it could have a negative impact on disadvantaged

children. The shadow education secretary, Laura Trott, posted on X: “Labour is repeating the mistakes of the past. They previously tried this approach of more ‘vocational’ courses at GCSE. What happened? The poorest children got funnelled down them, standards dropped and outcomes did not improve.”

Tom Richmond, an education policy analyst and former Department for Education adviser, echoed her concerns. He posted: “One of the biggest challenges will be making sure these new ‘technical pathways’ do not become a dumping ground for ‘those who can’t’.”

“Many UTCs initially struggled with being a dumping ground for the kids that other schools didn’t want (although that has changed over time).”

Marc Doyle, chief executive of the Quest Trust, a multi-academy trust which includes the University Collegiate School, a UTC in Bolton, is sanguine. “I’ve always been a huge believer in the power of technical education to improve life chances. It’s been music to my ears listening to Andy Burnham’s announcement. In Bolton we are part of the MBacc delivery group.

“All of a sudden the rest of the world is starting to catch up.”

PM calls for consensus on ‘urgent’ fix for social care

◀ **Continued from page 1**

be committed to exploring a system that would be free at the point of use, the same principle as the NHS. He is understood to regard other options, such as a care costs cap, as less attractive, though they would be significantly cheaper for the taxpayer.

A middle-ground option would be a model similar to Scotland’s, where personal care costs are paid by the state but other costs, such as accommodation and food in care homes, are borne by individuals and families.

Whichever option the government eventually pursues is likely to involve significant extra investment over the long term, most likely through increases in taxation. When Burnham first proposed a universal system of social care under Gordon Brown, he suggested replacing inheritance tax with a 10% levy on all estates. At the weekend he did not rule out this option, which could raise £18bn.

“This comes down to a choice,” said Burnham. “We can carry on passing the problem to the next generation, or we can face it head on and work together to build a care system that gives people dignity, security and the support they deserve.

“This is about bringing back hope that we can finally fix the difficult issues that have been ignored for too long, and making Britain believe again. That’s why I’m making this choice and I’m prepared to put everything I’ve got behind it.”

An average of 13,600 people a day were stuck in hospital beds last month despite being medically fit to leave, including some delayed because of the availability of adult

social care, underlining the pressure on the NHS.

While Labour MPs have broadly welcomed the prospect of an overhaul, several cautioned that there would have to be serious consideration of how to protect people from losing homes to care costs or penalising those who had already saved for retirement and care with new taxes.

One minister said Burnham “must exercise a lot of care” in managing trade-offs between quality of care versus cost and who pays for it. “There are no easy answers, and I don’t think we can just dive straight into saying ‘this is the solution and this is what’s going to happen’, because we have a prime minister and in many ways a government ... with no specific mandate on a specific measure.”

A centrist Labour MP said: “It’s vital the UK at least tries to do something because we will never be able to contain the rising costs of the NHS. Our ability to genuinely improve the quality of healthcare will be stymied if we don’t have a quality social care

service that relieves pressure.” Others on the party’s left urged the government to consider adopting a full NHS-style system that would rely on some taxation, but would also highlight that Burnham’s premiership is ready to not just “talk the talk but also walk the walk”.

“If we’re talking big and bold we shouldn’t shy away from this option,” one MP said. “It took from 1945 to 1948 to get the NHS up and running. We’ve still got years to start the process but we have to really try to shake this broken system.”

The Conservatives confirmed that Badenoch would be unable to attend the meeting as she was having pre-planned minor surgery. The shadow health secretary, Stuart Andrew, would attend in her place.

A Tory source said: “If Burnham was serious about working cross-party he would have given us more than 18 hours’ notice for a 30-minute meeting during recess and the invitation wouldn’t have been immediately press released. It’s almost like it’s only being done for show.”

Nigel Farage, who has not been invited as he is not a sitting MP and Reform has just seven seats, accused Burnham of “conspiring behind closed doors with the failed political establishment”.



◀ **A nurse and a care worker with a resident in St Cecilia’s nursing home, Scarborough. A solution to the UK’s social care crisis requires cross-party unity, says the prime minister**

PHOTOGRAPH: GARY CALTON/ THE GUARDIAN

UK finances High inflation could affect policymaking

Phillip Inman

Andy Burnham has been warned of “very difficult trade-offs in the next autumn budget” if the Iran war keeps oil prices and inflation high.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) said he faced a “challenging inheritance”, and plans to revamp public services would meet severe pressure from persistently higher prices.

With oil prices having briefly gone back above \$100 a barrel, and the strait of Hormuz effectively closed since March, the thinktank expected inflation to rise to 3.8% over the next seven months, forcing the chancellor, John Healey, to find £24bn by the end of the decade to maintain services and real-terms welfare payments.

The thinktank said it had cut its forecast for the chancellor’s

spending headroom in the budget from just over £7bn to nearer £3bn. The Office for Budget Responsibility, the government’s independent forecaster, estimated in March that the Treasury had about £22bn of spare capacity above existing spending commitments.

The NIESR said the economy would grow at a slower pace this year and in 2027 as a result of higher energy prices and the spillover effects from uncertainty created by the war.

It said a downgrade of growth to 1.1% this year, and the same slow pace next year, meant the UK would suffer £28bn in lost growth over two years compared with forecasts in January.

David Aikman, the institute’s director, said Burnham faced the highest borrowing costs in the G7, new spending demands and cost of living pressures.

He added there would be a temptation to ease the strain on the public finances and pay for new initiatives by raising the level of borrowing.

Aikman said this would be a mistake and only cause further strife in

later years, especially when another health or economic shock happens.

He added: “New commitments on defence or household support should be funded through taxation or savings elsewhere, not through further borrowing. Rebuilding the capacity to absorb future shocks will require a determined attempt to bring debt down.”

The NIESR said the government’s total debt, which has reached almost £3tn, or 95% of annual national income, was likely to rise again if the chancellor used borrowing to boost public spending.

The institute has proved to be one of the gloomier forecasters, predicting significant economic shocks that proved more muted.

Stephen Millard, the head of the thinktank’s macroeconomic forecasting, said the UK economy had proved to be “surprisingly resilient” in the first half of this year “but a slowdown is still to come”.

The NIESR expects inflation to average 3.1% in 2026, peaking at 3.8% in February 2027 after energy price cap adjustments. It said inflation will only fall back to the Bank of England’s 2% target in early 2029.

Bank officials meet tomorrow. Financial markets expect them to hold interest rates steady before raising them to 4% later in the year.

3.8%

The forecast peak for inflation in February 2027, with a return to the target level of 2% expected in 2029

Tory MP's claims of warning shots denied by France

Continued from page 1

After uploading a video of the incident to X, Philp claimed it could have been an attempt to censor debate about asylum seekers travelling to the UK in dinghies: "There was no notice or training exercise in place. Felt like warning shots or attempted intimidation."

After several hours of online speculation that the shots could provoke a diplomatic incident, the French authorities said the gunfire had nothing to do with Philp or the BBC and was conducted to ensure "operation-readiness" amid international tensions.

Earlier this month, a Russian warship, shadowed by a Royal Navy vessel, carried out a live-fire artillery exercise 46 miles south of Plymouth.

A statement from French defence staff said: "French Navy units train regularly. Individual combatant training is a normal activity for a vessel on operations."

"The statutory signals required by international standards for this type of firing exercise were displayed, and all safety protocols were followed."

"This exercise is unrelated to the presence of a British ship, which was outside the range of the firing. The Flamant was not engaged in an operation to monitor migrant vessels."

Chris Philp in the Channel speaking to the BBC when he heard shots from a French gunboat (below). The Tory MP, below right, is the shadow home secretary

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS PHILP; CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/GUARDIAN



Sketch John Crace



How Capt 'Hunter-Killer' Philp single-handedly took on those Frenchies to secure the Channel

C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre ... Capt Chris "Hunter-Killer" Philp had been on patrol since first light in the Channel. While the rest of the country was still asleep, the Philpster was scanning the horizon for rubber dinghies full of illegal immigrants. Something he had never done in his previous life as immigration minister.

Back then he had sought to

rehouse new arrivals in hotels. Now he wanted to send them to a watery grave.

It had been a quiet morning. Too quiet. Just the one sighting of a child with a rubber ring paddling off the beach in Boulogne. But Hunter-Killer was taking no chances. All it takes is one child and before long there will be hundreds of thousands making the crossing with swimming aids bought from the local Carrefour.

So he called in the RAF. Minutes

later, a Typhoon FGR4 had blasted the kid out of the water. Job done. *Pour encourager les autres.*

Half an hour later, all hell broke loose. A French warship had appeared to starboard. The next thing Hunter-Killer heard was the sound of 17 pops in the distance. "Get down," he shouted to his crew. "We're under attack." Weirdly, no one onboard the Philpster's MTB disguised as a fishing vessel seemed worried. How come they were so slow to sense danger? There again, few had the finely tuned antennae of the Philpster. Those years of training with the Special Boat Service had paid off.

Hunter-Killer threw himself on the floor of the wheelhouse, waiting for the gunfire to stop. "I think it's safe now," a deckhand said. "It was just some French sailor firing a handgun away from us into the sea. It wasn't as if he was aiming at us or anything. He was probably just test-firing. It's no big deal."

"You don't understand,"

squeaked Capt Philpster. "This was a definite attempt by the French to intimidate me. Typical of Johnny Foreigner to send out a warship to track the shadow home secretary. They don't like it up 'em. They've probably got special guns that fire round corners. So you think they're shooting in a harmless direction but the bullets turn 90 degrees in flight. I came within a whisker of being hit. Not that anyone gets to intimidate Hunter-Killer. Help!"

The crew looked rather nonplussed. Most of them hadn't even heard the shots let alone had any idea they had come under serious attack. But Hunter-Killer was adamant. The Frenchies had been out to eliminate him. He had got too close to stopping the small boat crossings and Macron would never stand for that. So he was prepared to stop at nothing. Even risk starting a global conflict. Well, it had ended badly for Napoleon and it would end badly for Macron.

"*Sacré bleu!*" said one member of the Border Force. "There are often

exercises at sea involving the Royal or the French navies, and shots are occasionally fired, usually blanks. This may be nothing at all."

The Philpster ordered him to keep quiet. The last thing he wanted was any collaborators speaking in French. Careless talk costs lives. He pulled the burner phone out of his pocket and speed-dialled Kemi. "I'm under attack," he gasped. "Even though the French aren't shooting at me, they are definitely shooting at me. They

"Typical of Johnny Foreigner to send out a warship to track the shadow home secretary. They don't like it up 'em"

Others were sceptical that a French gunship would have acted in response to Philp's interview, or been aware of it. One former senior Border Force officer said: "There are often exercises at sea involving the Royal or the French navy, and shots are occasionally fired, usually using blanks. This may be nothing at all."

Kevin Rowlands, a retired Royal Navy captain and journal editor at the RUSI thinktank, said it was unlikely that the French were deliberately trying to intimidate Philp. Naval vessels trained "pretty regularly" with small arms and the handgun appeared to be aimed "in a safe direction", he said.

"And so, on the face of it, I don't think this appears to be an incident where the French are actively trying to intimidate a British politician or the BBC. That seems a little bit much, from what I've seen."

Those on the boat with Philp said that the incident was unsettling.

Keohan described it as "the most unusual moment ... in the quiet of the Channel". He said he saw a French patrol officer at the back of the boat pointing a pistol towards the sea and believed that was where the shots came from.

"There was no warning for our boat, no signs given that this was the French intention," he said.

The captain of the fishing boat, Matt Coker, said he also believed it was an attempt at intimidation.

Coker told the Times, which was also on board the boat: "It's a bit strange that as they approached us there wasn't fire or anything and then as they went past, afterwards there wasn't fire or anything," he said. "They only seemed to be firing the weapons when they were right alongside us. So I find that a bit strange because we've got all this open sea out here."

Philp said it the French authorities denial "was not credible", adding: "They fired the live rounds at the closest point of approach to us - and didn't fire anything that we saw before or after. It looked and sounded exactly like deliberate intimidation."

A government spokesperson said: "This is a matter for the French authorities."

don't want me to stop small boats crossing the Channel even though I haven't seen any. We need to be on our guard. The smuggling gangs must be using invisible dinghies."

Kemi's eyes lit up. If only she was prime minister, she would be able to launch a tactical nuclear first strike on Calais. OK, there might be some collateral damage in Kent, but it would be worth it. Instead, she ordered the Philpster to disengage with the enemy.

"I can't do that," said Hunter-Killer. "While most politicians run from danger, I am trained to run towards it. So what I will do is film a clip of me being extraordinarily brave by doing nothing and then phone the French embassy to complain."

"If only they put as much effort into intimidating the people smugglers as they put into intimidating me. Not that I was intimidated. But it would be good to see the French navy also firing shots in the opposite direction to the dinghies."

► The image of a man wearing a T-shirt suggesting that he would welcome Nigel Farage's death which was shared by Polanski on social media
PHOTOGRAPH: @GREENPARTYZACK

'Terminally online' Social media slip suggests Polanski needs party intervention

Peter Walker
Senior political correspondent

It is just coincidence that a very public mishap by Zack Polanski arrived at the same time as new polls showing Labour in the lead. But it did neatly illustrate the point that while Andy Burnham is enjoying a political honeymoon, the Green leader's equivalent now seems over.

This is not to say the Green party in England and Wales are overly worried about the arrival of a new prime minister, or that there is necessarily much evidence yet that they should be.

One of two national polls this week showing Labour overtaking Reform for the first time in more than a year did also see the Greens' score fall by three percentage points. But the second saw them constant at a healthy 13%, well above traditional pre-Polanski levels.

Both publicly and privately, people in the party say that while Burnham is obviously a better communicator than Keir Starmer, they see no sign of him



▲ Zack Polanski with Hannah Spencer, the Green MP for Gorton and Denton, whose election in February was a key victory for the party

PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY DEVLIN/GETTY IMAGES

'There does seem to be a keenness from people around Zack for him to hand over the keys to his social media'
Senior Green party figure

being notably bolder on policy in ways that will tempt many Green supporters to look at Labour.

"It's still very early days, and we don't know what will happen with Burnham," one senior party figure said. "But on areas like the cost of living and drilling in the North Sea, it doesn't feel like much will change."

One thing that has happened since was Polanski sharing an Instagram post that included someone wearing a T-shirt intimating that they would welcome Nigel Farage's death, prompting an internal debate about their leader's prolific and largely solo social media efforts.

Polanski's official output, for example the much-watched videos of him talking to voters, are for obvious reasons done by professionals. But on X, Bluesky and Facebook, the Green leader likes or re-posts others' content at a dizzying pace.

As such, few were hugely surprised when he pressed the "collaborate" button on an Instagram post comprising around 20 photos from an event Polanski had attended, the first of which was a photo of the Green leader himself.

Near the end of the collection - and never, it seems, properly scrutinised - was a photo of a man wearing a T-shirt showing a guillotine and the words, "We're only making plans for Nigel", taken from a 1979 song by the band XTC.

The collection was swiftly removed from Polanski's feed with the party saying the T-shirt was "clearly in poor taste". Reform have asked the police to investigate.

There was, however, some internal debate in the party about whether to apologise to Farage, with the decision to not do so seen by some as an error, the Guardian understands.

It has also left the Greens wondering whether the sort of carpet-bombing approach to social media which helped Polanski build up his profile now needs to change, and particularly whether he needs assistance with this.

"There are discussions at all levels about how to avoid this sort of thing happening in the future," the senior party figure said. "There does seem to be a keenness from people around Zack for him to

hand over the keys to his social media accounts."

Another party source said Polanski had to be rescued from himself when it came to social media: "There is a problem among some people of being terminally online, and Zack is terminally online."

Not everyone agrees. "The whole point about Zack is that he does his own stuff, and that's quite exciting for a party leader," another senior figure argued.

But as he approaches a year in the job, the coming weeks do feel like a moment for Polanski and those around him consider a stock-take, and what comes next for a party which has expanded hugely in both membership and relevance since he became leader.

The heady days of the stunning byelection win for Hannah Spencer in Gorton and Denton was five months ago. The morning after, Polanski said it was only his party's 127th target seat and the victory showed "there's no no-go areas for the Green party".

Friday brings the result of the mayoral byelection in Greater Manchester triggered by Burnham's departure. Polls suggest the Greens will come third, a big improvement on their fifth place in 2024, but not a moment for renewed euphoria.

Some in the party, while still supportive of Polanski, argue that he needs to find a way to move beyond existing just in a campaigning mode, and to begin to look more like someone who could play a part in government.

There is some envy for the narrative created by the communications team around Burnham, albeit with the obvious advantage that they are working with someone who is now prime minister.

"They introduced him very cleverly as this friendly guy in a T-shirt, but it evolved, and now he's a serious man in a suit meeting world leaders," one Green source said. "Our videos to introduce Zack were great, but something seems to have gone missing since then."

"The risk is that Burnham ends up looking like a safe pair of hands. If he manages to seem totally sensible, and we seem un-sensible, that's when people might move to Labour."

greenpartyzack and 4 others
Marlon Funaki · when sunday comes around



MP suing Musk's xAI says chatbot trained to make harmful content

Haroon Siddique
Dan Milmo

An MP suing Elon Musk's xAI company over fake sexualised images created by Grok has said the AI tool was instructed to operate with "no restrictions on adult sexual content or offensive content".

Jess Asato's lawyers yesterday published details of publicly posted instructions that they argue illustrate how Grok was trained to generate harmful sexualised content.

Asato is taking legal action against xAI after she says its chatbot was used to create fake images of her, including in a bikini, and a video showing her as the victim of a sexual assault, causing her to feel "distressed and violated".

The claim says that as well as Grok being instructed to operate with "no restrictions on adult sexual content or offensive content", the AI tool was told to offer "no restrictions on fictional adult sexual content with dark

or violent themes" and to "assume good intent". While not relevant to Asato's claim, the instructions also state that "'teenage' or 'girl' does not necessarily imply underage". However, they do prohibit "child sexual abuse material".

Asato, the Labour MP for Lowestoft, Suffolk, said: "No woman or child should have to live with the fear that their face or body can be taken, sexualised and shared around the world by an AI system without their consent. For too long, this company has hidden behind the excuse that it's the users who are responsible, when in fact the tool's design recklessly allows sexualisation, even without being asked. What happened to me wasn't an accident, Musk made a choice to profit from harm and trained Grok to abuse."

Grok on occasion added explicit material users had not asked for, while xAI breached data protection law and misused Asato's private information, the claim alleges.



▲ Jess Asato said that xAI's owner, Elon Musk, below, 'had made a choice to profit from harm' and his company must be held accountable

PHOTOGRAPH: SEAN SMITH/THE GUARDIAN



Ravi Naik, legal director at AWO, the firm representing Asato, said: "The case shows that Grok did not malfunction. Grok's training allowed it to generate harmful sexualised content. Grok behaved according to the choices its designers made. Those choices should carry legal consequences. The remedy our client seeks includes a court order requiring the systems be brought into compliance if xAI refuses to do so."

Clare McGlynn, a professor of law at Durham University, said some of the Grok-generated images cited in Asato's claim included sexualised elements - such as a skirt being pulled

'The tool's design recklessly allows sexualisation, even without being asked'

Jess Asato
Labour MP

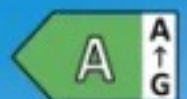
up - that were not requested by users in the original prompt.

She said: "I think one of the most significant aspects of the Grok phenomenon, and Jess's case, is how it adds sexual, intimate and violative content that the user themselves did not request. This is a new and distinctive form of abuse, where the chatbot themselves are driving the abusive content, drawing on the data on which they are trained."

Details like this, she said, raise concerns about controlling AI tools and their outputs, as technology companies push for autonomous AI "agents" which can carry out sequences of tasks without human intervention or oversight.

The company has since said users would no longer be able to use the tool to generate sexualised images of real people, and it has now become illegal to create a non-consensual deepfake image of an adult in the UK.

xAI was approached for comment.



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Booker longlist led by previous winners Marlon James and Douglas Stuart

Emma Loffhagen

Douglas Stuart and Marlon James, two previous winners of the Booker prize, have been named on this year's longlist alongside three-time nominee Elizabeth Strout, in a collection that "rewards risk".

The 13 novels selected for the 2026 prize longlist, announced yesterday, are written by authors of seven nationalities across three continents, with almost half from the UK. Ten of the writers are appearing on a Booker longlist for the first time, including three debut novelists: Kenan Orhan, Rebecca Perry and Djamel White.

The classicist and broadcaster Mary Beard chairs the judging panel, which includes Jarvis Cocker, the frontman of Pulp.

Beard said each book on the longlist "brilliantly musters the power of words on the page to take the reader to new places, to see old places from new angles, to change minds".

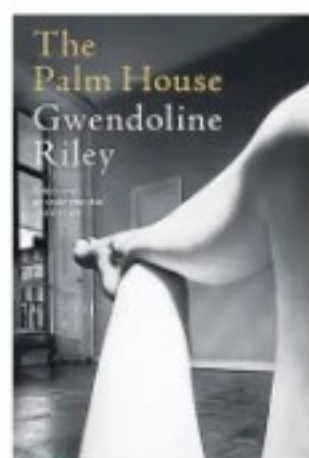
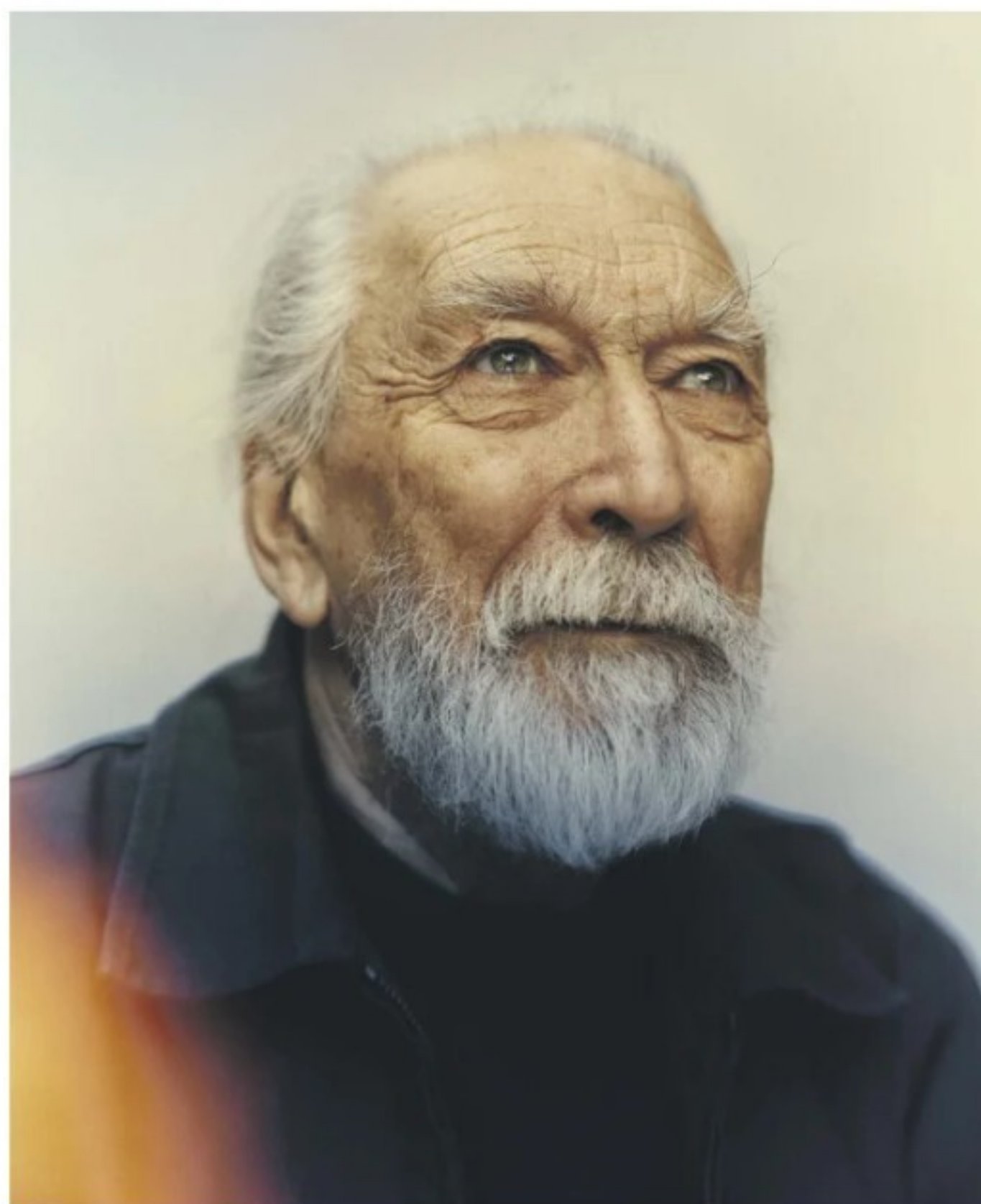
James is longlisted for his novel *The Disappears*, based around a homophobic mob attack in 1980s Jamaica. The judges called it "a reckoning" from "a singular literary talent". James won the prize in 2015 for *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

Stuart, who won in 2020 with his debut, *Shuggie Bain*, returns with his third novel, *John of John*, which the judges praised for its "rich, textural detail". Should either win again, they would become only the fifth author to take the Booker twice, joining JM Coetzee, Peter Carey, Hilary Mantel and Margaret Atwood. In 2010 the Booker winner JG Farrell also won the *Lost Man* Booker prize, a one-off awarded by public vote.

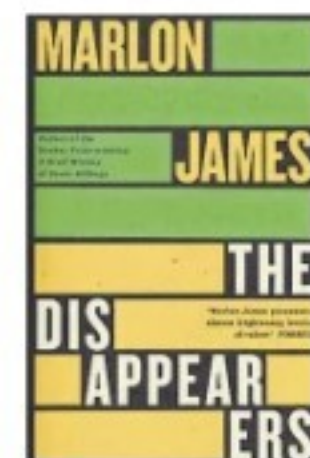
Strout picks up her third Booker nomination for *The Things We Never Say*, her critically acclaimed 11th novel, which reckons with the state of Donald Trump's America. Strout was longlisted in 2016 for *My Name*



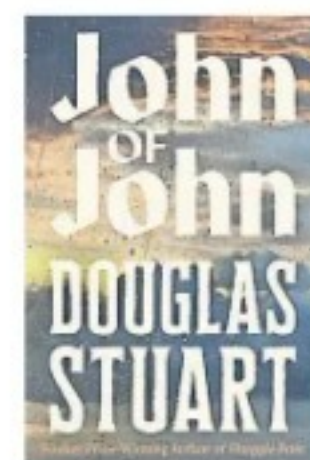
► With *The End of Everything*, M John Harrison, 81, may become the oldest writer to win the prize



◀ Gwendoline Riley's novel *The Palm House* offers readers a contemporary portrait of literary London



◀ Marlon James could win a second Booker prize with *The Disappears* after his first in 2015



◀ Douglas Stuart, who has won the prize before, was hailed for John of John's 'rich, textural detail'



◀ *The Things We Never Say*, about Trump's America, is the third novel to be nominated by the US author Elizabeth Strout

novelist, poet and essayist; and Rebecca Liu, a Guardian journalist. Cocker follows in the footsteps of others in the entertainment industry who have judged the prize in recent years, including Sarah Jessica Parker, Adjoa Andoh and Robert Webb.

"I was aware that I was, shall we say, the least formally qualified person on this jury, but I didn't really let that bother me," Cocker said in an interview. "Knowing that the Booker prizes tend to create panels including people who aren't necessarily part of the literary world - but can read - helped me, and I thought I was obviously supposed to bring something that others don't: a different perspective."

The list also includes Emma Cline's *Switzky*, which tells the story of a man's final journey to a euthanasia clinic in Zurich; Luke Kennard's *Black Bag*, a comedy about a struggling actor; Rebecca Perry's *May We Feed the King*, which won the 2026 Waterstones debut fiction prize; Gwendoline Riley's *The Palm House*, a portrait of literary London; and Missouri Williams's *The Vivisection*, described as an antidote to the "cosy campus novel".

The shortlist will be announced at the Southbank Centre in London on 22 September, with the winner named at a ceremony on 9 November.

between 1 October 2025 and 30 September 2026.

Joining Beard and Cocker on the judging panel are the poet and author Raymond Antrobus; Patricia Lockwood, a Booker prize-shortlisted

'[The list] shows how capacious an art form the novel is ... and rewards risk'

Gaby Wood
Booker Prize Foundation

Former Top Gear star Hammond hit with £999 in speeding fines

Jamie Grierson

The former Top Gear host Richard Hammond has been fined £999 by a court after being caught speeding twice in three weeks while driving his luxury cars.

The 56-year-old presenter was in a Porsche when he broke the speed limit on 2 December and was caught out again 20 days later while driving a Bentley.

West Mercia police brought two prosecutions against Hammond, putting forward the speed camera images of him driving the cars in

Herefordshire to prove the offences.

Hammond, who hosted Top Gear with Jeremy Clarkson and James May between 2002 and 2015, before the trio launched *The Grand Tour* on Amazon Prime, pleaded guilty through his lawyers to two charges of speeding.

At Telford magistrates court last week he was given seven penalty points on his licence. Ann Minton, the magistrate, ordered him to pay a total of £1,771, comprising fines of £333 and £666, £240 in costs and victim surcharges totalling £532.

Documents from his court case show Hammond was caught by a police officer with a speed camera just before 1pm on 2 December.

Hammond's Porsche Taycan Cross Turismo was clocked at 68mph in a 50mph limit on the A40 in Pencraig, Herefordshire. At about 11.45am on 22 December, Hammond's Bentley Continental GT was clocked at 82mph in a 70mph limit on the A50 Rudhall overbridge in Herefordshire.

Police sent speeding tickets to the Grade II*-listed Herefordshire castle Hammond bought in 2012 and a £1m

farm estate near Hereford, but the letters were returned marked as "addressee gone away".

They tracked him down to his £2m mansion near Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, where it was noted more than 30 vehicles were registered.

Police set out in court papers that Hammond had been accused of another driving offence in August last year. Hammond was prosecuted for two offences of speeding and two further allegations that he had ignored police letters and failed to identify himself as the guilty driver.

Organ support machine 'may save four in five wasted donor lungs'

Anna Bawden

Health and social affairs correspondent

A machine that keeps organs alive outside the body could save four in every five donated lungs that now go to waste in England and Wales.

The UK has one of the poorest lung transplantation rates in the world. Most adults wait a year for a transplant and some wait two years or more. One in five adults awaiting an urgent transplant die within a year

of joining the transplant list, before a suitable lung is found.

But fewer than one in four donated lungs are used, with donations sometimes declined not only because of organ quality but also due to staffing and theatre capacity issues.

Draft guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends that the XVIVO perfusion system be used in the NHS for a four-year period to assess its effectiveness and value for money.

Nice estimates that the machine could help rescue four in five donated

lungs that are currently unused, by helping them remain viable, which could unlock hundreds of organs for transplants.

The machine warms donated lungs and pumps a fluid through them that mimics blood plasma, while ventilating them to simulate normal breathing. This allows medical teams to monitor how the lungs are functioning, treat infection, drain excess fluid and reinflate collapsed areas.

The perfusion system has been trialled at three adult transplant centres. Nice said the draft guidance

aimed to ensure all transplant centres could benefit from the technology, regardless of their size or location. It can now also be used for paediatric cases.

Dr Anastasia Chalkidou, Nice's healthtech programme director, said: "Every donated lung is a precious gift, and right now too many of them never reach a patient who needs them. This technology has the potential to change that, giving transplant teams the time and information they need to make the most of organs that would otherwise go unused."



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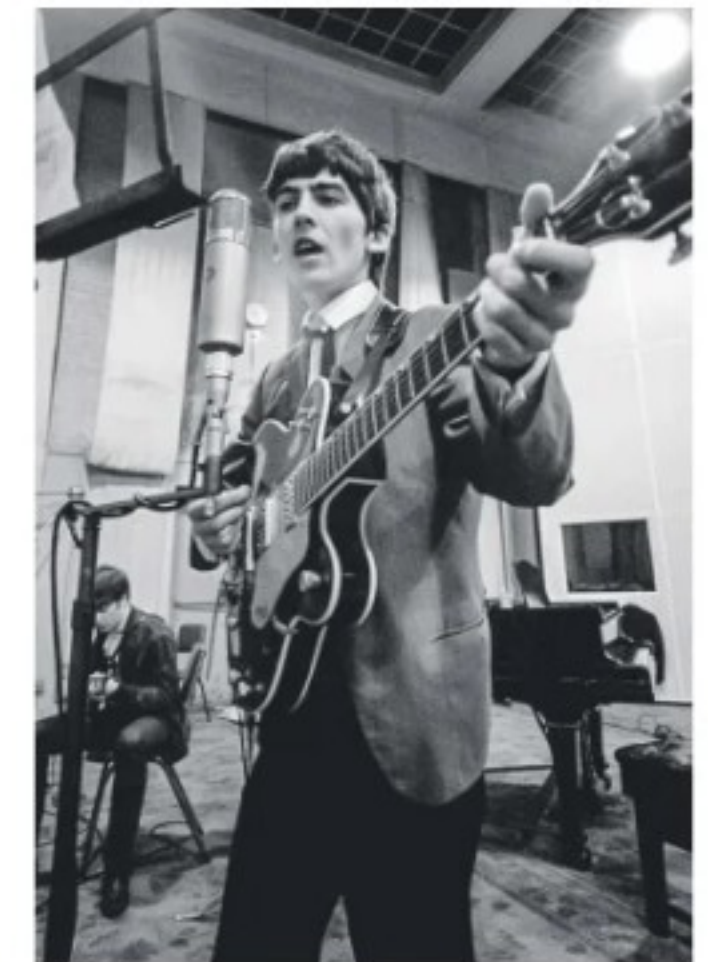
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▲ The Beatles in 1963. The photographer, Terry O'Neill, asked them to go outside the Abbey Road studio to get better light PHOTOGRAPH: TERRY O'NEILL/PA



▲ George Martin, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and John Lennon



▲ Harrison working on *With the Beatles*, the band's second album



Tracks of glory

The Abbey Road recording studio, where bands including the Beatles, Pink Floyd and Oasis recorded hits, is the focus of a show on "almost a century of music history". Abbey Road: Reframed features photographs including the studio's Neumann U47 microphone, its "Mrs Mills" piano, and handwritten documents by engineers. The exhibition will be at London's Iconic Images Gallery from 11 to 22 August.



▲ Pink Floyd at a recording session for *The Dark Side of the Moon*



▲ Noel Gallagher of Oasis tuning his guitar at Abbey Road in 1996

Man killed two friends and then murdered cellmate in prison

Steven Morris

On a spring day last year, James Desborough marched up to Cornwall's county hall in Truro and began bombarding the offices with dozens of eggs stolen from a supermarket.

It was a drug and drink-addled protest at his plight - homeless, jobless and generally angry at the world. He expected to be arrested and messaged a friend: "If I'm going to get nicked, might as well round the charges up."

He certainly did that. In the months after the egg incident, Desborough committed three murders.

He killed two vulnerable friends, Claudio Aquilino and Daniel Coleman, whose dismembered and burnt bodies were found in woodland close to a shack where he sometimes lived off-grid in south Cornwall.

Then while awaiting trial he murdered Steven Kempster, his cellmate in Exeter prison, strangling him to death because he was annoyed with his snoring.

Desborough, 40, is already serving a life sentence for the prison killing. After a jury at Winchester crown court convicted him of murdering his two friends, he may never be released. Mr Justice Saini will sentence Desborough today, and made it clear he could face a whole-life term.

The judge described the circumstances - a person being sentenced for two murders while already jailed for life for killing someone in prison - as "unique".

Acquaintances have said Desborough was a "control freak" with a terrible temper - he has an old conviction for grievous bodily harm - and was furious at what he saw as his bad luck in life. A civil engineer by profession and a father, he had fallen on hard times.

Quite what tipped him over into an explosion of violence is unclear. He used Aquilino's and Coleman's bank cards after he killed them, but police do not believe it was a simple matter of theft.

The prosecutor in his trial, Ahmed Hossain KC, put it to Desborough that he might have killed them because he considered them worthless, deserving to die because of their troubled lifestyle and because they were "dinlos" - a local slang term for fools.

Had he simply got annoyed with them and snapped? "I thought they were OK," he replied in court. "They were good friends."

The trial put the focus on a different Cornwall to the one most holidaymakers to the county love. It highlighted not surfing beaches and historic landscapes but the deep-rooted social issues that make life for many in the far south-west of England difficult.

Desborough, Aquilino and Coleman were among those who - in the words of the defence barrister, Sean Brunton KC - had slipped through the cracks in society. The three got to know each other when they lived in a hostel for homeless people in the seaside resort of Newquay.

In the months before he died, Aquilino, 57, was taking hard drugs, suffering from depression and subjected to "cuckooing", in which dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person. Coleman, 43, abused alcohol and had cirrhosis. He had been kidnapped and stabbed at the age of 13, leaving him with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The police were first called in after Coleman was reported missing. He had last been seen on 3 June 2025, drinking with Desborough. Police thought they had solved the case quickly when they found a body in woodland between Truro and the village of Probus.

It turned out not to be Coleman though, or Aquilino, but a third man, Lee Hockey, who had vanished from Truro. Police believe he too may have

► James Desborough was found guilty at two trials of three murders and will be sentenced today. Above, the cabin where he sometimes lived off-grid in south Cornwall

PHOTOGRAPHS: DEVON & CORNWALL POLICE



been murdered, but have not linked his death to Desborough.

Attention began to focus on Parmoor Woods near Sticker, once a mining settlement now popular with people who work in St Austell.

Desborough had inherited land there from his grandfather and built a shack, though, to his frustration, he did not have the correct planning permission and had been told by the council that he was not allowed to live there permanently.

He would let homeless friends camp there, grew cannabis and had a "stash tree" where he hid class A

drugs in a hollow. Machetes, knives and saws were also scattered around the property.

Police searched the woods for five months, eventually finding the remains of Coleman and Aquilino. The latter had last been seen alive on 18 April 2025, also drinking with Desborough.

Codenamed Operation Honeyfall, the search was extraordinary. More than 700 officers and scientists were involved, with Devon & Cornwall police drawing on resources from five other forces. Dog teams, soil experts and anthropologists were brought in.

'He not only brutally murdered both men, but then desecrated their bodies'

DS Rachael Bentley
Devon & Cornwall police

The weather was very hot and the nature of the terrain jungle-like and boggy. Officers sometimes had to wade through water up to their chests as they searched.

In excess of 1,900 burnt bone fragments - Aquilino's remains - were discovered in a stream, while Coleman's charred body parts were found in a shallow grave. A hatchet hung on a nearby tree.

Another unusual feature was that Desborough kept a beady eye on the search. Before there was enough evidence to remand him in custody he hung around, at one point telling a forensic biologist that he liked the dismemberment scenes in the serial killer show Dexter.

As well as discovering the victims' remains, police came upon notes and plans Desborough had made that suggested he may have been planning to change his appearance through plastic surgery after the murders and flee the UK, perhaps to south-east Asia.

He was eventually charged with the two murders and held in Exeter prison sharing a cell with Kempster, who had been jailed for drunkenly suffocating his 91-year-old father in north Devon.

Desborough's appearance in the witness box was remarkable. He was considered so dangerous that he was handcuffed to an officer when he was moved from the dock.

He was articulate when speaking about his time as a civil engineer, but he was less certain when he told the story of finding the bodies of Aquilino and Coleman.

He claimed he had come upon one hanging in a tree, the other naked in a stream. It was, in his words, a "series of unfortunate circumstances".

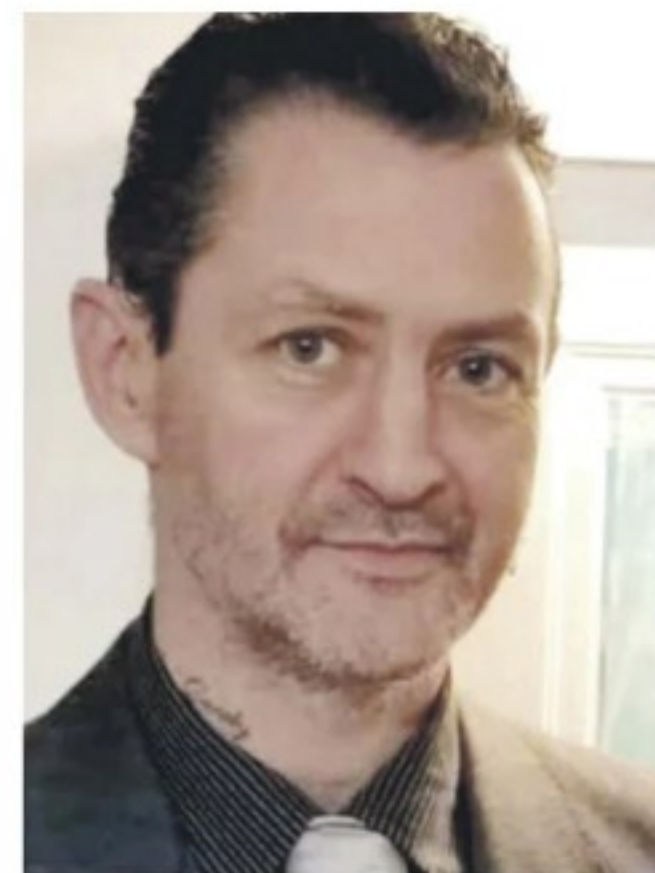
Desborough repeatedly denied killing the pair, but accepted burning and hiding their bodies while high on ketamine and drinking tequila.

During the trial there was a suggestion that Desborough might have carried on killing, murdering members of his circle who could have implicated him in the deaths of his friends or who simply annoyed him.

In one note he had written: "I'm a killer and ready to execute any predators." In another, headed "bug out" - military slang for a retreat - he set out what appeared to be escape plans but added: "Take out the remaining muppets."

Det Supt Rachael Bentley, head of Devon & Cornwall police's major crime investigation team, said: "The murders of Claudio Aquilino and Daniel Coleman were callous and cold-blooded."

"Both men were vulnerable and trusted James Desborough as their friend. Desborough not only brutally murdered both men, but then savagely desecrated their bodies, seeking to hide the evidence of his crimes. In doing so, he denied both men of dignity and their families of the opportunity to say goodbye."



▲ Murder victims Claudio Aquilino and, right, Daniel Coleman. Centre, a map left by Desborough in his cabin

Campaign group gets £27,000 after Gaza banner destroyed

Haroon Siddique

Legal affairs correspondent

The campaign group Led By Donkeys has received £27,000 in compensation after a giant banner it displayed in Parliament Square saying “Yes it’s a Genocide” was seized by the Greater London Authority and destroyed.

Representatives of the GLA arrived on the scene in central London and confiscated the 40 metre by 40 metre banner after it was unfurled on 4 December 2024, just over a year after Israel began its assault on Gaza following the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas.

Led By Donkeys said its 19-month campaign to get it returned was initially met with refusals before the GLA told the collective that it had been given to the environmental services company Veolia, which had destroyed it.

After legal letters were sent on behalf of Led By Donkeys demanding that either the GLA or Veolia cover the banner’s cost, Veolia has agreed to pay £27,216.

Ben Stewart, a co-founder of Led By Donkeys, said: “The Parliament Square banner was in collaboration with one of the world’s leading genocide scholars, but still the authorities threw process out the window and simply seized and destroyed our property. Pursuing compensation



▲ Led By Donkeys spent 19 months trying to get the banner returned after it was seized in London

PHOTOGRAPH: JIRI REZAC/LED BY DONKEYS

was never about the money, it was about defending space to protest Israel’s war crimes.

“Palestine protests are treated differently in Britain to all other forms of activism. Direct action is regarded as terrorism and words on a placard are rendered illegal.

“Over the years we’ve delivered banners, put up billboards and done guerilla projections across the country, but the only time our equipment has been seized and destroyed was when it related to Palestine.”

The banner was filmed from the air, and a video that was posted on social media featured a voiceover from the renowned Israeli scholar Prof Amos Goldberg, a historian of the Holocaust, who said: “This is exactly what a genocide looks like ... Right now, we have mass denial, both in Israel and around the world.”

In September last year, the UN independent international commission of inquiry concluded that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza and that Israeli officials, including the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, incited these acts.

Last month, the commission of inquiry said Israel continued to commit genocide by deliberately targeting Palestinian children in Gaza. Israel has persistently denied allegations of genocide.

Its foreign ministry called last year’s report by the commission “distorted and false”, and Israel’s mission in Geneva rejected last month’s findings as a “libellous sham”.

A significant body of research by legal and rights experts has concluded that Israel is committing what is considered the most serious international crime, including analyses by UN investigators, rights bodies such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and genocide scholars worldwide.

In February, the European Legal

Support Center, along with the research group Forensic Architecture, launched the “index of repression”, which records instances of Palestinian solidarity being “silenced, criminalised and sanctioned” in Britain. They said more than 900 instances had occurred in the past six years.

A spokesperson for the Greater London Authority said: “A banner seized by GLA heritage wardens following an unauthorised protest in December was unfortunately damaged during storage and subsequently disposed of by our contractors.”

A Veolia spokesperson said: “We were asked by our client to collect the banner and store it temporarily at one of our local depots.

“Regrettably, after around 12 weeks, the banner’s condition deteriorated and became a health and safety hazard for our operations and the depot had to dispose of it. We have reimbursed Led By Donkeys for the full cost of the banner, due to the unintentional damage caused.”

Nurse struck off over abusive treatment of patients

PA Media

A nurse who told a patient to “fuck off” and another to “shower because she smelled” has been struck off.

Dean Thomson was a registered advanced nurse practitioner for the NHS homeless health service in Southampton when the incidents took place in 2021 and 2022.

A panel heard Thomson had once told a patient “to have a shower because she smelled” and described her as “childish” and “pathetic” and told her to “grow up”.

He ignored or refused colleagues’ requests for help and on at least one occasion “deliberately” acted in an “obstructive manner” by moving patients from his allocated list back to triage.

He also spoke to another colleague in a way that made her cry, a Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) fitness to practise committee heard.

Thomson did not attend the hearing. The committee ruled his actions amounted to professional misconduct and his fitness to practise was impaired.

It said: “The panel was of the view that the findings in this particular case demonstrate that Mr Thomson’s actions were serious and to allow him to continue practising would undermine public confidence in the profession, and in the NMC as a regulatory body.”

Thomson agreed his fitness to practise was impaired due to his misconduct, according to the panel’s outcomes and reasons document.

An 18-month interim suspension order was imposed because he still has the option to appeal the panel’s decision.

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Evidence used to deny asylum claim 'may be AI hallucination'

Diane Taylor

A senior judge has accused the Home Office of relying on "AI hallucinated" information to refuse an asylum claim.

The case relates to a woman who fled Morocco with her child after she experienced forced underage marriage and extreme violence, including rape.

She claimed asylum on the basis of fears that she would be killed by

her husband, a powerful convicted criminal. The Home Office refused her case, citing a document known as a "country policy information note" (CPIN), which they said confirmed that Morocco would be safe for her.

But the supposedly independent and authoritative document could not be found, although its existence was relied upon by a judge who rejected her appeal against the Home Office's refusal in an immigration court known as the first tier tribunal.

The woman appealed to the upper tribunal, where another judge raised

concerns about the unlocated document. In a decision on 14 July, the judge said: "It appears that no such CPIN has ever existed."

He added in relation to the missing document: "No such document has been located in the public domain and ... the Home Office's country policy and information team has been unable to confirm its existence."

He said the letter refusing the woman's asylum claim "bears hallmarks consistent with the use of artificial intelligence. It may therefore transpire that references to

country information note Morocco July 2021 in that letter are a result of an AI 'hallucination'. If so that would represent an extremely serious failing on the part of the [Home Office]."

The judge added that relying on a document that did not exist was "analogous to relying on bogus evidence". He determined that the issue was a "procedural irregularity".

The Guardian asked the Home Office if the document existed. After sending a link to an archive where it could not be found, the Home Office produced unpublished internal guidance known as a country information note (CIN). No CPIN has been published on Morocco since 2017. In the course of the case, the Home Office's references changed from the CIN to the CPIN, which are generally treated as authoritative by judges.

The internal document, which was never disclosed to the court, does not

conclude that Morocco is a safe country for the forcible return of women such as the appellant. It states that in 2018 exemptions were made granting 40,000 child marriages - one in five of the total marriages that year.

It adds that Morocco's laws do not explicitly criminalise marital rape and that women who report this may be criminalised for engaging in sex outside marriage if they are disbelieved by the authorities.

Home Office sources said they were able to provide additional information about the case that the judge had requested.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "We keep our asylum system under constant review. Claims are always considered on their individual merits and based on the latest evidence to ensure only those in genuine need are granted UK protection."

The woman's case continues.



▲ Peter Parker is obsessed with MJ (Zendaya) and her boyfriend. Left, a too-familiar scene of Spider-Man swinging through the digitally confected city

PHOTOGRAPHS: FLIXPIX/ALAMY; LMKMEDIA

Film review

Our interest in Spidey spectacular hangs by a thread

Spider-Man: Brand New Day
Marvel Studios

★★★★☆

Peter Bradshaw

Just a few weeks ago, Tom Holland was telling us that his role as Telemachus in Christopher Nolan's *Odyssey* was his "last chance to play a boy". Well, Holland is back as the supposedly scrappy, gawky, arachnid young superhero Spider-Man. Not Spider-Boy, admittedly, and these days Holland is actually a chunkier and more stacked Spidey than previously, flexing some pretty serious biceps. He is maturing in the role. But is the role maturing with him?

The point is that this film is a reset. At the end of the last movie, *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, courtesy of Dr Strange's colossal psychic powers - which might have come in handy in this episode incidentally, part of the narrative-universe inconsistency that you just have to overlook - Peter Parker

was able to erase everyone's knowledge that he is, in fact, Spider-Man, and that includes his goofy best friend Ned Leeds (Jacob Batalon) and more to the point, the love of his life, MJ (Zendaya).

So now Peter is simply back where he started, adored by New Yorkers for crime-fighting as Spider-Man, living in a scuzzy single room with all his screens and tech gear, his secret identity a secret once more, but pining for the people he loves. And he's not getting any younger. How much of a "brand new day" is this?

Now Spidey has to tackle a sinister new entity that appears to be possessing the bodies of important people around town - starting with the villainous Scorpion (Michael Mando) - with a view to attacking and infiltrating a key government unit, the Department of Damage Control, run by Bill Metzger, played by the excellent Tramell Tillman (from TV's *Severance*).

Zendaya saves this film. She rescues it from silliness and the generic *deja vu* over-familiarity that threatens to sink it

It is a disquieting new development that coincides with unprecedented new physical and mental health issues for Parker. He has headaches, and these appear to be taking our hero to what I can only describe as the David Cronenberg zone.

To tackle these inner and outer crises, Parker/Spidey has to consult Black Widow (an amusing cameo from Florence Pugh). He also has to seek advice from the ageing academic Dr Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) AKA the Hulk. And Spider-Man finds himself in a fractious frenemy-bromance with the highly strung tough guy Frank "Punisher" Castle, whose life he once saved,

played by Holland's *Odyssey* castmate Jon Bernthal.

But most importantly of all Parker is obsessed with finding ways to cross paths with MJ, in effect stalking her and masochistically witnessing her making out with her new boyfriend. And he has some very big, even slightly shocking scenes with Zendaya - the other *Odyssey* cast-member. These are encounters that hold out the painful hope that he can somehow rekindle the flame, somehow find happiness while pursuing his lonely vocation.

Zendaya saves this film. She rescues it from silliness and the generic *deja vu* over-familiarity that is always threatening to sink it. Something in MJ's civilian status, her non-superhero identity, brings Zendaya's grownup acting presence to the fore in ways denied to everyone else on screen, including Holland. Her naturally relaxed style and self-possession give the proceedings a boost, especially with the flash of transgressive sexuality that she shows us at one moment. Director Destin Daniel Cretton gets the best out of her.

Otherwise, things are the same in Spideyworld in ways that we will recognise with affectionate exasperation. *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, like all MCU movies, always gravitates towards apocalyptic but weirdly temporary destruction in the digitally confected big city. It's an entertaining spectacle, but really without the novelty of movie-iterations like the more experimental Spider-Verse animations. A more radical reboot is needed.

Released in cinemas today



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Fossil quest

How brush with death led to finding a 'sea dragon'

Donna Ferguson

When Matthew Myerscough walks along a beach, he cannot help hunting for fossils. "I think my fossil radar is always on - even if I'm not looking, it's hard sometimes to not see things," said the civil engineer, who has discovered thousands of fossils on British beaches.

It was while he was "not looking" on Lavernock beach near Penarth, south Wales, that he recently stumbled across the fossilised bone of a type of plesiosaur, a marine reptile that roamed the oceans while dinosaurs stalked the land during the early Jurassic period.

Encased in hard limestone bedrock, the 201m-year-old jaw - with its unusual spoon-shaped end - once belonged to a "sea dragon" known as a rhomaleosaur, and was the first of its kind found in Wales.

"That was an amazing discovery; a really, really exciting find, by complete chance," said Myerscough, 40. He initially strolled past the fossil with two fellow fossil hunters, then decided to return for a closer look.

"There were so many places we could have walked that day. And when I think about the research paper being done at the moment about that fossil, and everything that we will learn, everything that will be understood from finding it - none of that would have been possible if we'd been 3ft to the left."

For Myerscough, however, fossil hunting is not just about finding fossils. It is tied to his recovery from a terrifying near-death experience.

In February 2014, he was hiking up Yr Wyddfa, also known as Snowdon, in north Wales when he was thrown off a cliff during an avalanche. He will never forget the feeling of being airborne, he said, and then being "compressed in the snow" when he came to a halt, unable to tell which way was up. "It was like being cast inside a block of concrete, I couldn't move any part of my body."

He was discovered unconscious and barely breathing 20 minutes later, buried beneath more than

► Matthew Myerscough with the rear paddle from a plesiosaur, one of thousands of fossils he has discovered on British beaches

PHOTOGRAPHS:
CERI OAKES

"There is this mindful, state I get into because I'm forgetting about all the worries in life"

Matthew Myerscough
Fossil hunter

► Myerscough recommends fossil hunting on a falling tide and warns against venturing close to cliffs to pick around fresh rock falls



a metre of snow. He had fallen 300 metres. Badly bruised and shaken but miraculously uninjured, it took him only a few days to recover physically after he was rescued from the mountain. But he found his thoughts returning repeatedly to the accident.

It was in the aftermath of the experience that he turned to fossil hunting, which he had first enjoyed as a boy during holidays in Whitby on the Yorkshire coast. It proved to be the distraction he needed to escape his negative thoughts. "There's this mindful, almost meditative state that I get into because I'm forgetting about all the other stresses and worries in life."

Scanning the rocks for inconspicuous - and often almost imperceptible - signs of fossils takes a lot of concentration.

And there is something he finds particularly soothing about fossil hunting beside the sea. "When I'm there, I feel this connection [to the ocean], imagining this life in the



distant past. Finding a huge skull full of razor-sharp teeth and an enormous eye from an extinct sea monster from millions of years ago - it's so exciting."

Since he started fossil hunting, he has chanced upon some extraordinarily rare finds, including a plesiosaur flipper, a huge dinosaur footprint and an ichthyosaur forefin and skull.

He details how and where in the UK he discovered each of his

▲ A row of ichthyosaur vertebrae found in North Yorkshire, where Myerscough first hunted for fossils as a boy

"star finds" in his recent book, *In Search of Sea Dragons: A Fossil Hunter's Odyssey*.

In doing so, he sheds light on the secretive world of fossil hunting - a world in which most collectors and avocational palaeontologists choose not to reveal the locations of their most exciting finds.

Myerscough, by contrast, wants to share everything he has learned about fossil hunting with the world.

His top tip for those trying out fossil hunting for the first time is to go on a guided tour. Once you start seeing fossils, "you start seeing them everywhere".

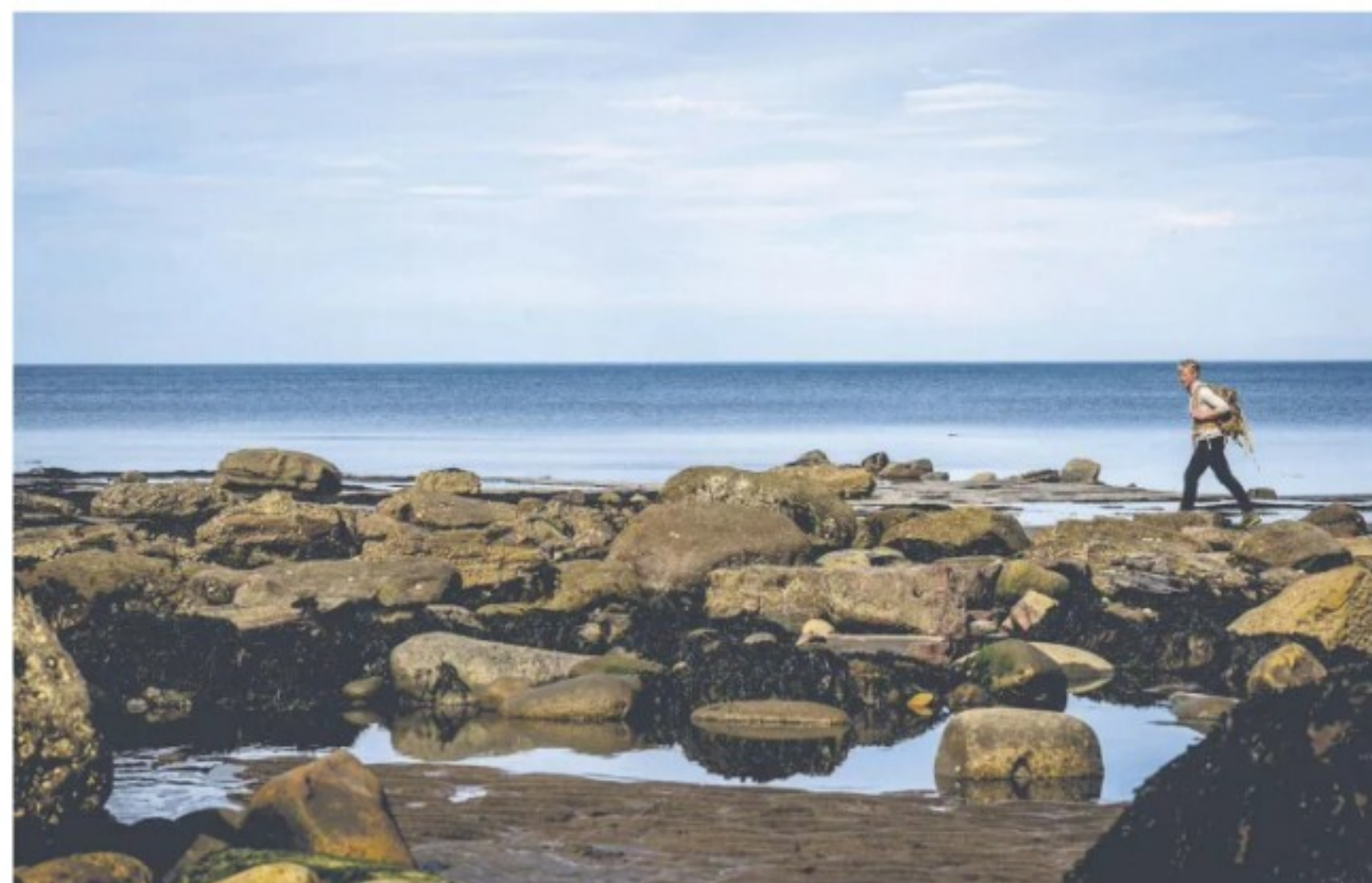
But he warns that the pastime can be just as physically demanding as mountaineering. He often carries large rocks or even boulders long distances on foot, as well as different hammers and a chisel.

There are also dangers around fossil hunting on beaches, mostly due to unpredictable cliff falls and rising tides. These risks need to be considered and mitigated, he says - for example, by always going fossil hunting on a falling tide. "The best finds are after the sea has cleaned the material, so you can see the sides of the rock," he added.

Myerscough also discourages people from going close to the cliffs to pick around in fresh falls.

He sees fossils as "gifts from nature" and hopes his book will help more people discover the joy of finding these seaside offerings.

"The luck of finding these things is just extraordinary. When you think about the events that needed to happen, all those millions of years ago, for something to be fossilised, it seems remarkable. And then for this fossil to be exposed once again on the Earth's surface, in the cliffs, then on the beach, and then to be found by some one ... the odds of all of those things happening seem remarkable, too."



Eyewitness



▼ Ibrahim Naji al-Dabba, centre, and his sons tend their hives on a damaged rooftop in Gaza City

PHOTOGRAPH: OMAR ASHTAWY/THE GUARDIAN



'It is hope'

Beekeeping in the rubble of Gaza City

Lina Abu Zayed

Each morning, Ibrahim Naji al-Dabba climbs to the roof of a damaged residential tower in Gaza City's Tel al-Hawa neighbourhood, where rows of beehives sit surrounded by shattered concrete and the scars of war. It is not an ideal place for beekeeping, but for the 49-year-old father of seven, it is the only way he can continue the work that has sustained his family for decades.

Before the war, al-Dabba owned more than 400 beehives in eastern Gaza. His apiaries, equipment and storage facilities allowed him to manage a thriving business. Today, almost everything he built over years of work has disappeared.

"Beekeeping is not just a business," he said. "It is my family's only source of income. It is our life, our livelihood and our future."

Al-Dabba, who is the president of the Cooperative Society of Beekeepers in Gaza, specialised in producing honey, breeding queen bees and developing bee strains adapted to the climate. Before the war, Gaza's beekeeping sector had continued to grow despite years of blockade.

That changed after the conflict erupted. Unable to reach his apiaries, al-Dabba watched his life's work vanish. He lost his home, beehives, honey-processing equipment, storage facilities and nearly all his tools. He estimates his financial losses at more than \$350,000 (£263,000). "The hardest moment was realising that everything I had spent years building was gone," he said.

Al-Dabba was displaced during the war. He later searched for other work but found none. Instead, he returned to the profession he knew best. He bought three beehives for more than \$3,000 - a significant investment. Because moving between agricultural areas was dangerous, he placed them on the roof of a residential block.

He and his sons expanded the three colonies into 35 hives. Honey production remains limited, but every successful harvest represents something far greater than income. "I don't feel that I'm only taking care of bees," al-Dabba said. "I'm trying to preserve a part of the life that I lost because of the war."

"The bees are like the people here," he added. "They continue working despite the hardship ... As long as there is even one beehive, and one beekeeper holding on to this profession, there is hope that life can begin again."

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World

'At least 1,500' death row inmates on hunger strike in Tehran prison

Deepa Parent

Prisoners in Iran's largest jail have sewn their lips shut as hundreds joined a mass hunger strike amid a surge in executions over drug offences and charges linked to anti-government protests.

The hunger strike, involving at least 1,500 death row prisoners at Ghezel Hesar prison near Tehran, began two weeks ago after six men convicted on drug-related charges were transferred to solitary confinement before their possible execution, according to Iranian rights groups.

In videos shared by rights groups in exile, prisoners are seen sitting in a prison hallway, holding placards

reading "No to executions" and chanting: "Be our voice".

In one graphic video, a prisoner addresses the camera to say he is sewing his lips shut because, six days into the hunger strike, no prison official has responded to the protest. The footage then shows another prisoner off camera using a needle and thread to stitch the man's lips together.

In another video, a prisoner calls for urgent medical help for those whose conditions he says are deteriorating. "The guards will not open the door so we can take them to the prison infirmary," he says.

The protest is the latest act of defiance in the prisoner-led campaign against executions, which began in January 2024 and has spread across prisons in Iran amid a sharp rise in

the use of the death penalty. There has been a huge increase in executions this year amid the war with the US, and families of those on death row and rights groups have raised the alarm over the worsening human rights crisis in the country.

At the weekend, Donald Trump abruptly called off a two-week bombing campaign, but has threatened to restart strikes unless negotiations with Tehran make progress.

One source in Tehran said: "Whenever the shadow of war over the

regime lifts even slightly, the regime becomes more savage."

They noted that a prisoner was executed on 6 April - the date that the US and Iran agreed to a ceasefire. "The intensity of executions has actually increased since the war supposedly ended."

According to the Oslo-based non-profit Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), at least 424 executions have been carried out so far this year. Most executions were handed down in drug-related cases, IHRNGO said.

Yesterday, officials hanged two men convicted of "waging war on God" over the deaths of two police officers during anti-government demonstrations. Twenty-six people linked to the January protests have been hanged this year.

Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the director of IHRNGO, said many death sentences passed on political prisoners and protesters were issued on the basis of confessions extracted under torture, while people sentenced to death for drug offences were among the most marginalised and voiceless prisoners on death row.

"Last year alone, at least 795 people were hanged on drug-related charges, with almost no international reaction and hardly any domestic or social media campaigns to save them," he said. "By staging this protest, the prisoners in Ghezel Hesar are taking an extraordinary risk. They know that the authorities can execute them at any moment, yet they have chosen to raise their voices in the hope that the international community will finally hear them."

According to Amnesty International, revolutionary courts, which have jurisdiction over national security and drug-related offences, lack independence and routinely impose harsh sentences, including death sentences, after grossly unfair trials.

In a message relayed to the Guardian, one death-row protester said: "We are prisoners who turned to

424

The number of people executed in Iran so far this year, according to the Iran Human Rights group



► Trump in the Oval Office yesterday with Zelenskyy and, left, Benjamin Netanyahu, whom the US president has belittled in foul-mouthed tirades

PHOTOGRAPHS: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SERVICE/GETTY; ANADOLU/GETTY

'Impossible to predict' Zelenskyy and Netanyahu brave White House whims

Julian Borger

The converging visits of Benjamin Netanyahu and Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington offer an unusually eloquent snapshot of a world in turmoil, unmoored from decades-old certainties.

Some things remain the same. The US is still an almighty military and economic power and for both foreign visitors, a White House encounter with Donald Trump is critical to their governments and the wars they are fighting.

The imperial presidency Trump has tried to forge is in decline, however, in large part as a result of

his own erratic leadership. He may see his visitors as client-potentates flying in from the edges of empire to kiss his ring. But they will be as aware of Trump's weaknesses as they are of their own.

Netanyahu and Zelenskyy arrive in Washington on opposite trajectories. The Israeli prime minister's star has declined dramatically since he persuaded Trump to join him in an ill-conceived war on Iran five months ago, on the groundless promise that the Tehran regime would quickly collapse.

Since then, a viscerally disappointed president has publicly scolded Netanyahu and insisted the Israeli leader would ultimately do his bidding, while the White House has liberally leaked Trump's foul-mouthed tirades belittling him.



Israel has been left out of negotiations with Iran and its views were ignored when it came to selling F-35 stealth fighter planes to Turkey and making a nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia. A survey by the

Economist and YouGov found that nearly half of Americans polled thought that Netanyahu should be arrested on arrival for war crimes.

By contrast, Zelenskyy is in the ascendant. Ukraine has defied the

US administration's predictions of inevitable defeat to Russia's might. It is now a world leader in drone warfare and parts of the Magaverse are warming to the accidental war leader they once scorned as a loser.

Kashmir crackdown Pakistan accused of killing 30 protesters

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Images of liberation Black arts pioneer Betye Saar dies at 99

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▲ Death row inmates on hunger strike in Ghezel Hesar prison sit in a hallway holding placards to try to draw attention to their plight PHOTOGRAPH: INSTAGRAM

such mistakes simply to afford the basic necessities of life, and deeply regret our actions. Where else in the world is a human life taken for a first mistake?"

A similar protest was held at the prison in October last year, when more than 1,500 prisoners went on

a six-day hunger strike, leading to a rare visit by authorities. But activists say conditions have not improved.

Moein Khazaeli, a lawyer at Dadban, a counselling centre for Iranian activists, said executions continued following unfair trials over drug-related offences. "In many cases,

defendants do not have access to lawyers or a meaningful right to defend themselves," he said. "There are also cases in which charges are fabricated against people from ethnic minority or poor backgrounds. Death sentences issued by the revolutionary courts are a violation of human rights and even Iran's own laws."

Amiry-Moghaddam said: "The Islamic Republic has no legitimate justification for using the death penalty for drug offences. It is not required by Islam, and the authorities themselves have repeatedly acknowledged that executions have failed to deter drug trafficking or drug use. Those sentenced to death are rarely major traffickers; they are typically the lowest-ranking couriers, recruited because of poverty for a small payment. Many are convicted solely on the basis of confessions extracted under torture."

Families of those on death row in Ghezel Hesar have staged protests outside the prison in support of those inside, but sources said authorities violently cracked down on these.

Additional reporting
Patrick Wintour



Lindsey Graham, a Republican hawk of the old school who could be relied on for wholehearted support of the Israeli and Ukrainian war efforts. In that respect, he was one of a dying breed.

But this administration is not a normal one. It is led by a president who rules on a whim, and neither visitor can predict how he will be received. Neither wanted cameras in the room. Trump began his presidency by throwing his full support behind Netanyahu and his wars. Facing a hostile electorate, he is trying to extricate himself from the region, but he is finding Israel the most recalcitrant party.

In Ukraine, Trump threw out the foreign policy handbook, proposing peace deals that often echoed Moscow's talking points, rewarding aggression with territory Russia had not even won on the battlefield. Rather than capitulate, Ukraine showed it could fight on despite drastic cuts in US military aid, relying more on Europe and its own hard-won expertise.

Now Zelenskyy finds himself the unlikely darling of far-right Maga influencers such as Laura Loomer, formerly an apologist for the Russian invasion, who interviewed him last week and called for "moral clarity" over support for Kyiv.

Zelenskyy's ascent may mirror Netanyahu's simultaneous decline, but that does not mean they came to Washington with comparable status. When it comes to the Trump administration, they arrive from very different starting positions.

Just about anything would count as an upgrade for Zelenskyy compared with his infamous White House ambush in February 2025 by Trump and JD Vance, the vice-president, who tried to humiliate

**Netanyahu's star
has declined, while
Zelenskyy's is now in
the ascendant**

the Ukrainian visitor in front of the cameras, demanding gratitude and acceptance of defeat with "no cards" left to play.

Zelenskyy does have cards this time but is well short of a winning hand without US support. His immediate aim is modest: for Trump to honour Graham by backing a Russian sanctions bill the senator was pushing at the time of his death. He knows that direct US military aid to Ukraine is not likely to return in meaningful quantities any time soon.

The Patriot interceptors and other weapons Ukraine once counted on for its defence have been used up wholesale in the Middle East, many of them to protect Israel. It will take years for the US to rebuild its own stocks. Netanyahu may be out of favour in the current White House, but the US is committed to Israel's defence in a manner and on a scale of which Ukraine can only dream.

Netanyahu and Zelenskyy came to Washington on different footings, but they do at least share an awareness that their relationship with the administration can be upended with scant notice, without any clear reasons, in a matter of mere seconds in the court of the irascible, flagging would-be emperor.

Analysis Dan Sabbagh



Iran may not have won, but it's shown the US can't achieve its goals by military power alone

Has Iran won a war it didn't start against the US? It is not a victory in any conventional military sense: about 3,500 Iranians have been killed and the US-led bombing raids have caused up to \$270bn (£188bn) in damage.

Yet Donald Trump's decision to pause the 13-night bombing campaign in effect is a recognition that the US cannot achieve its goals by military power alone.

"Iran's initial standard for victory was simply to survive," said HA Hellyer, a Middle East expert with the Royal United Services Institute thinktank. If anything, that's been raised, he suggested. "The regime has demonstrated it is not going anywhere, and Tehran has changed the calculus on the strait of Hormuz."

The past five months are a clear demonstration of how an asymmetric conflict can flip the tables. All Iran has needed to do is maintain enough of a missile and drone capability to scare merchant shipping from using the strait of Hormuz. It is a low bar that Iran's military is still clearing.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has spent at least \$38bn and used more than 1,000 Tomahawk and 1,100 JASSM cruise missiles to bomb targets in Iran, according to estimates by the Center for Strategic and International Studies thinktank - a third and a quarter respectively of total US stockpiles.

It is surprising that the US has allowed key munitions to be run down at such speed. On Monday, Trump tried to blame Ukraine, arguing that "so much was given" to Kyiv in military aid - though Ukraine was never given long-range cruise missiles, only Patriot air defence systems.

Patriot missile interceptors were more heavily depleted by 1,000 or so, or 50% of the total US stockpile, raising questions as to how well the US can continue to defend its bases in the Gulf. More were used during the 38 days of heavy fighting in the spring than the 600 or so that Ukraine has said it received during four years of war.

A fresh escalation in the Red Sea by the Houthis, Iran's allies in Yemen, complicates the picture further. The rebel group kept out of the first phase of the US-Iran war

in the spring, but as Saudi Arabia seeks to redirect oil traffic through the Red Sea, they have stepped up attacks, targeting a refinery in the Saudi city of Jizan on Saturday.

The US's stated central war aim, meanwhile, may have repeatedly shifted, but it has always been maximalist - whether it was regime change (as demonstrated by the killing of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei), destroying Iran's missile programme or, as most frequently stated, preventing it from having a nuclear weapon.

Yet the US has no means of enforcing this level of demand without committing ground forces in numbers to occupy Tehran - an unlikely move for which it has shown no signs of preparing.

Donald Trump's previous threats to bomb Iranian power plants to try to force the regime's capitulation have raised the concern they would amount to war crimes; he dropped the threats in April and did the same again last week.

"I don't think the Iranians can be bombed into accepting US terms," said Peter Ricketts, a former UK national security adviser. "Until the US accepts it can't get its way by bombing, Iran has effective leverage."

The resulting situation is what Ricketts calls an "escalation dominance" that he says favours Iran. Tehran, faced with US pressure to abandon its nuclear programme, can string out peace negotiations, wait for the White House to get impatient, goad the US into restarting bombing and once again close the strait of Hormuz at modest cost.

The question then becomes who gains as the instability endures. Tehran may well believe it has leverage as the US heads towards midterm elections in November, given how unpopular the war is. Just a third of all Americans support the war, according to a Reuters/Ipsos survey out yesterday, though that rises to 71% of Republicans.

But if Tehran has short- or medium-term leverage, any idea that it has won the war is exaggerated. Hellyer argues that Iran, long struggling under western sanctions, cannot afford to rebuild without an agreement with the US: "Ultimately, this isn't sustainable for Iran because its economy isn't going to be able to survive."

'You don't age down here'

Armenia's salt mine for asthma patients on the brink of closure

Pjotr Sauer
Yerevan

For most people, spending hours deep underground in darkness would seem an odd prescription for better health.

Yet every morning, a handful of Armenians descend 250 metres beneath the earth into an active salt mine where they spend six hours in cavernous chambers carved from rock salt, hoping the air below ground will help them breathe more easily.

"I tried every possible treatment, and this is the only thing that worked," said Mikayel Torosian, an asthma sufferer visiting the clinic. "I thought it was complete rubbish before I tried it, but I am a true believer now. It saved me."

Since its opening in 1987, patients have travelled to the Soviet-era mine for an alternative treatment known as speleotherapy based on the belief that the mine's salt-saturated, allergen-free air can alleviate respiratory diseases.

But the future of the Republican Steleotheropethic Center, one of the world's only hospitals in a deep salt mine, now hangs in the balance after Armenia withdrew government funding, raising broader questions about the state's role in supporting alternative medicine.

The journey into the hospital begins with a rattling industrial lift that drops patients deep beneath a residential district on the outskirts of Yerevan. At the bottom, a maze of tunnels stretches through the rock. At first glance, the underground cavern looks more like a cold war bunker than a hospital. Behind curtains, patients nap on narrow beds. Others play pool, pace around and perform breathing exercises or simply sit in silence, passing the hours in what might be one of the world's most unusual medical facilities.

"It looks unusual, but after a few days, people begin to enjoy the peace," said Dr Anush Voskanyan, who has worked at the clinic since 1989. Voskanyan said the idea to start the clinic emerged after doctors noticed that workers in salt mines appeared to suffer unusually low rates of respiratory illnesses despite spending their lives underground.

She said researchers began studying the mines' microclimates, eventually leading to the creation of specialised underground clinics across parts of the Soviet bloc.

Voskanyan attributes the health benefits to a combination of factors: salt-rich air, year-round



◀ Dr Anush Voskanyan, left, and nurse Alvert Alihanyan, right, exercising with a patient

PHOTOGRAPHS: SOFIA MARIA BERGMANN

◀ Patients can play pool or table tennis at the clinic in Avan mine, which is 250 metres below ground

▼ The rock tunnels, bottom left and right, contain places for privacy and rest - and are thought to be pollutant-free



19C temperatures and the absence of allergens, pollution, noise and radiation. "This is the perfect climate to live in. You basically don't age here," she said.

Patients typically spend six hours a day underground over a three-week course of treatment. Doctors say the first week allows the body to adapt to the mine's unique environment before the benefits gradually begin to accumulate.

At its peak, thousands of patients descended into the Avan mine every year, many receiving treatment free of charge through Armenia's healthcare system.

"We used to admit 60 people at one time," Voskanyan said, looking around largely empty chambers. "Today, there are probably five." The clinic's fortunes changed

in 2019 when the Armenian government withdrew state funding, arguing that speleotherapy lacked sufficient scientific evidence to justify public support. Patients who once attended free of charge now have

'We used to admit 60 people at one time. Today, there are probably five patients'

Anush Voskanyan
Doctor



to pay for each treatment session at a cost of about £20. The decision came as Armenia began reforming its healthcare system and preparing for the introduction of universal health insurance, forcing officials to make difficult decisions about what treatments should be covered by the state.

"We're on the brink of closing down," Voskanyan said. "We're still operating, but just barely, and could close any day."

Voskanyan insists the treatment works, particularly for children suffering from asthma and allergies. "There have even been cases where asthma attacks stopped completely after just one course of treatment," she said.

While speleotherapy has been practised for decades across eastern Europe and the former

Soviet Union, relatively few large-scale studies have been conducted and most clinics have closed down. Many respiratory specialists view it as a complementary therapy that may ease symptoms but should not replace conventional treatment.

For supporters, however, the lack of definitive research does not negate decades of patient testimony. "If it didn't help, I wouldn't be coming back," said Alvert Alihanyan, who has repeatedly returned to the clinic over 10 years from Russia.

For now, each morning, the lift continues its descent beneath Yerevan. Whatever the debate over its medical benefits, the mine offers something increasingly rare above ground: hours of complete silence, no wifi and a brief escape from the noise of the outside world.

Cockroach party warns of more protests after student arrests in India

Hannah Ellis-Petersen
Delhi

India's Cockroach movement has accused the government of backtracking on its promise not to act against student protesters and has threatened to restart demonstrations.

The Cockroach Janta party (CJP), which organised mass protests over exam paper leaks, said it had received reports of hundreds of students being detained or "harassed" by police.

Cases were filed against students in Delhi, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar, all states ruled by Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

The CJP had agreed to call off the demonstrations on Saturday after the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, resigned and senior BJP ministers assured the group that no punitive action would be taken against protesters. But on Monday, the CJP accused the government of reneging on the agreement.

"If the government does not honour the agreement and release everyone detained or arrested we will be compelled to resume the protest," a CJP spokesperson, Ashutosh Ranka, told reporters.

At least 100 people have been arrested, many on stringent, non-bailable charges, according to the CJP. A legal fund has been set up to help cover their expenses.

The youth-led movement has won millions of followers on social media since it was launched in May by Abhijeet Dipke, a 30-year-old public relations graduate. Hundreds of thousands of protesters, mainly students, rallied last week in Delhi and other cities, demanding Pradhan's resignation and broader reforms of the examination system.

Demonstrations in the Indian capital turned violent on 20 July when huge crowds attempted to march to parliament. Police fired teargas and used batons to disperse them, causing clashes and a wave of detentions.

The protests were an unprecedented show of dissent against the Modi government, which has cracked down on critics and opposition over its 12 years in power. Pradhan's resignation was the first time a senior minister in the Modi government had been forced out by public pressure.

The chief justice of India called for an independent investigation after a petition was filed in the supreme court alleging police brutality, stating that the "right to peaceful, lawful protest is absolutely guaranteed" under the Indian constitution.

The government has promised to act on the issues that sparked the protests, and announced a panel to oversee an overhaul of India's examination system. On Monday, it introduced a measure in parliament seeking tougher penalties for exam paper leaks.

Pakistan accused of killing 30 peaceful protesters in Kashmir

Shah Meer Baloch
Islamabad

At least 30 people are alleged to have been killed in Pakistan-administered Kashmir on Monday, in an escalation of violence and an alleged state crackdown that has engulfed the disputed region for weeks.

According to a local civil society group, Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), the Pakistani security services fired on tens of thousands of peaceful protesters, killing 25 people on Monday and five more yesterday.

Protests and violence have been erupting in Pakistani Kashmir since June. The state has in response imposed a severe communication shutdown, including an internet blackout that cut the region off from the rest of Pakistan, and began carrying out mass arrests.

Amnesty International yesterday called for Pakistani authorities to lift the communications blackout.

JAAC and their supporters had taken to the streets to call for electoral reform in the heavily militarised region. Monday marked the first phase of an election disputed by local groups who say a system of reserved seats for refugees from Indian-administered Kashmir now living across Pakistan gives outsiders too much control over the region.



◀ Pakistani security personnel guard a polling station in Mirpur on Monday, which marked the first phase of a disputed election after weeks of violence and protests

PHOTOGRAPH:
AMIRUDDIN MUGHAL/
EPA

SA Khan, a spokesperson for JAAC, accused Pakistan's security agencies of firing on unarmed protesters in Mirpur yesterday and then removing the evidence.

"Security forces have taken away the dead bodies and locked away the hospital in Mirpur," he said. "We have the photos and video evidence of dead bodies lying on streets in a pool of blood. The security forces abducted the dead bodies to erase the evidence."

A resident in Mirpur, requesting anonymity for fear of retribution by the authorities, said the violence erupted yesterday afternoon when people gathered to protest against killings the previous day. "The bodies were shifted to hospital and then they

went missing. Now, all shops nearby have been closed after the violence," they said.

The Guardian could not independently verify the death toll as media representatives were prevented from accessing the area and the internet blackout remained in place, making it difficult to reach local communities. Pakistani media has largely ignored the protests and alleged killings.

Pakistani authorities have rejected accusations of state involvement in the killing of civilian protesters. In a press conference over the weekend, Atta Tarar, the information minister, alleged that the protests in Pakistani-administered Kashmir were receiving "funds and instructions" from India.

Khan, the JAAC spokesperson,

rejected the accusations that the unrest was sponsored by India. "It is nothing new: people asking for political or economic rights are termed India-sponsored or anti-state in Pakistan, same goes in India," he said. The protests, led by JAAC, have been ongoing for a year, demanding political and economic rights for local people, as well as electoral reforms.

Pakistan-administered Kashmir has been rocked by bouts of deadly violence in recent years. The protests that began in June, calling for abolition of 12 reserved seats for refugees from Indian-administered Kashmir, have prompted the deadliest crackdown in years. Locals say the reserved seats are used by the central government to retain control over the region and destabilise regional politics.

About 40 people were alleged to have been killed when violence erupted and the government accused protesters of killing policemen. The local government responded by proscribing JAAC as a terrorist organisation, arresting and detaining its political workers en masse and responding to protests with force.

It prompted the UN high commissioner for human rights, Volker Turk, to call for an investigation into the violence.

Isabelle Lassee, Amnesty International's action regional director for South Asia, said: "The disturbing reports emerging from Rawalakot are consistent with the Pakistani authorities' long history of unlawful violence against protesters in Jammu and Kashmir. A prompt, independent and transparent investigation must be ordered into the security forces' use of force against protesters."



Standing guard Soldiers from the Hussars of Junin line up outside the government palace in Lima yesterday during the swearing in of the conservative leader Keiko Fujimori as Peru's president. She won elections in June by fewer than 50,000 votes after defeating the leftwing candidate, Roberto Sánchez, in the latest victory for the resurgent Latin American right.



PHOTOGRAPH:
RENATO PAJUELO/EPA

US teenager who won bravery award is shot dead by another boy

Ramon Antonio Vargas

A US city councillor has said “something has to change” after a 15-year-old boy who earned a commendation months earlier for defending a young girl from sexual harassment was shot dead by another teenager.

Da’Jon Anthony Hayes-Burr was shot on Saturday night in Louisville, Kentucky, according to local authorities. He was pronounced dead in hospital and police charged a 14-year-old boy with his murder, the news outlet WAVE reported.

Police neither named the arrested teenager because of the suspect’s age nor released a possible motive in the

killing, saying it remained under investigation.

But after the coroner’s office identified Hayes-Burr as the victim, tributes poured in for the boy, who in April had made headlines for protecting a 12-year-old girl from being sexually harassed by a man more than three times her age, and survived being stabbed in the process.

Crystal Bast, a Louisville council member, wrote on Facebook that she could not help wondering “about the future this young man should have had”. Hayes-Burr was preparing to enter his second year of high school.

“I can’t stop thinking about ... the life he should have lived [and] the difference he could have continued making in this world,” Bast said. “We

have babies out here killing babies. Something has to change.”

The council previously said Hayes-Burr had demonstrated “extraordinary courage, compassion and selflessness” – as well as “valour far beyond his years” by coming to the aid of Kristyn Stasel.

Stasel told the news outlet WLKY that she and her daughter were leaving a fireworks show when she heard a man direct a sexual comment toward the child.

When she told the man that her daughter was 12, Stasel said he replied by saying “never too young to have some fun” – so she began screaming for help.

Hayes-Burr heard Stasel’s cries and, with other boys, confronted the man, who was later identified as 45-year-old Vasilis Sakellardis, WLKY reported.

Sakellardis allegedly tried to charge Stasel but was thrown to the ground by Hayes-Burr and the other boys. A tussle ensued while Stasel and her daughter kept walking, and Sakellardis evidently stabbed Hayes-Burr before police reportedly tackled and arrested him.

After spending a night in hospital, Hayes-Burr told the news outlet



▲ Da’Jon Anthony Hayes-Burr came to the aid of a mother and daughter

WHAS he had never imagined being put in a position like that, but had stepped in after realising that “a lot of grown men around ... weren’t going to do [anything]”.

“So, we had to do something,” Hayes-Burr said.

Stasel told WHAS that Hayes-Burr and the others who faced Sakellardis “were raised right”.

The Louisville city council subsequently awarded the teenager a proclamation.

In May, Andy Beshear, the Kentucky governor, sent Hayes-Burr a letter thanking him for his courage and selflessness as well as a ceremonial challenge coin recognising his bravery.

In a statement on Monday, Beshear

said he and his wife, Britanny, “are praying for Da’Jon’s family and all those affected by this tragedy”.

“Da’Jon was a child of God whose life was taken far too soon, and his bravery and selflessness will leave a lasting impact on the Louisville community,” he said.

Stasel herself shared a news story about Hayes-Burr’s killing as well as a link to an online fundraiser dedicated to assisting his mother, Lakeita.

Since 2020, firearms have been the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the US between the ages of one and 19, ahead of car accidents and poisoning, according to researchers.

A statement attributed to Hayes-Burr’s family called his death “tragic and senseless”.

The statement also asked the public “to honour Da’Jon’s memory by choosing kindness, standing up for others, and helping us put an end to the senseless violence that continues to take the lives of our young people”.

“Da’Jon will always be remembered as a hero, a loving son, a cherished family member and a young man whose courage will never be forgotten,” it added.

Betye Saar, a pioneer of the Black arts movement, dies aged 99

Roque Planas

Betye Saar, a pioneering figure in the Black arts movement, died on Sunday morning in her home town of Los Angeles at the age of 99.

A practitioner of assemblage, a style that builds sculpture from everyday objects, Saar was best known for reclaiming Jim Crow era memorabilia such as dolls and washboards and recasting them as images of Black liberation. Saar also worked in printmaking and film, exploring themes such as family and spirituality.

Roberts Projects, the Los Angeles gallery that represents her, said: “Her symbolically rich body of work has evolved over time to demonstrate the environmental, cultural, political, racial, technological, economic and historical context in which it exists.”

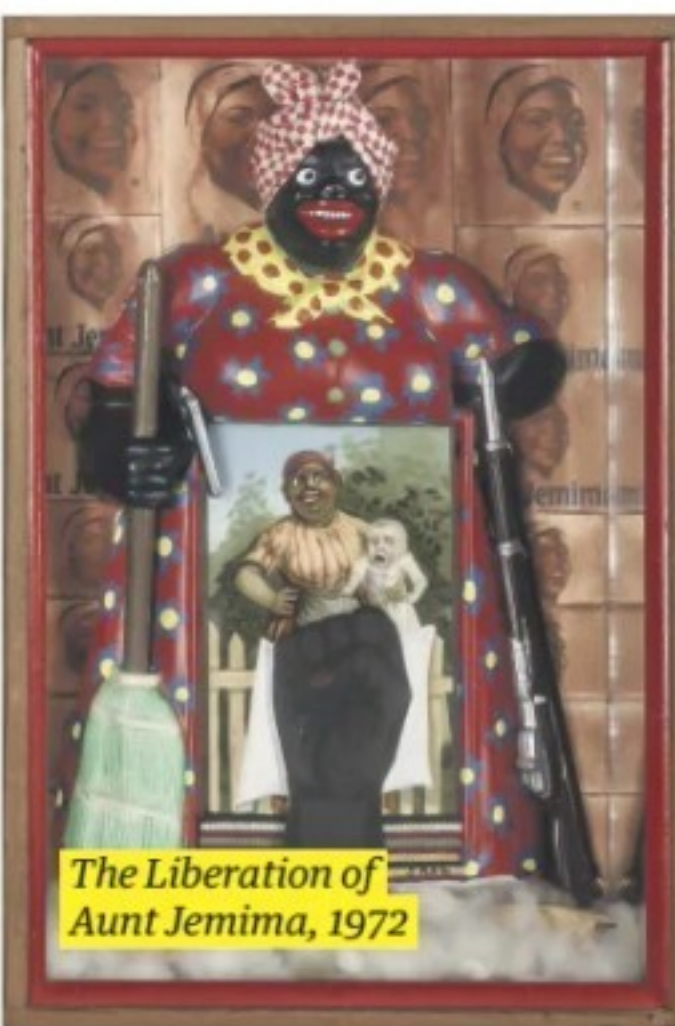
Beginning her career in design, Saar shifted to art at the age of 35. She continued to make art into her 90s.

Saar grew up in Pasadena and was part of a community of Black artists in nearby Altadena. She often cited the Los Angeles public sculpture Watts Towers, by Simon Rodia, as an early source of inspiration.

Throughout her career, Saar combed flea markets and yard sales for discarded objects showing how consumer culture depicted Black Americans. “My work has to do with recycling,” she told a documentary crew in the 1970s, according to the



▲ The artist Betye Saar was an exponent of assemblage, building sculpture out of everyday items, and used this to subvert objects showing how consumer culture depicted Black Americans PHOTOGRAPH: BETHANY MOLLENKOF/THE GUARDIAN



Los Angeles Times. “Each item I collect has a certain energy from its previous function that carries over into its new use.”

She is perhaps best known for her 1972 revolutionary reimagining of Aunt Jemima, the image once used to sell a pancake mix and syrup brand. Aunt Jemima was based on “mammy” images that depicted enslaved Black women as contented domestic servants. In Saar’s Liberation of Aunt Jemima, she holds a rifle in her left hand and a grenade wedged between her right arm and chest.

Quaker Oats stopped using the Aunt Jemima image in 2021.

Saar’s work also used natural materials gathered from travels around the world exploring the African diaspora and spirituality.

“Wherever I go, I say: ‘What’s the

alternative religion?’ because every country has it,” she said in a 2021 interview with the Guardian. “There are lots of other people that believe in magic and they have their own religion, and I was just really interested in what they did and what their ceremonies were, but mostly what the visual images would be.”

Saar taught and mentored a generation of Black artists, including the painter Kerry James Marshall.

‘Each item I collect has an energy from its previous function’

Betye Saar
American artist

Canadians spent \$3.3bn less on travel to US after Trump’s return

Olivia Bowden
Toronto

Canadians spent \$3.3bn (£2.48bn) less on travel to the US in 2025 than in the previous year, as Donald Trump’s hostile policies towards his northern neighbour continue to incur an economic cost, new government data shows.

The research also indicates that Canadians are not bucking travel overall and instead have replaced US vacations with other international destinations, in a rebuke to Trump’s tariff regime and the president’s continued musings on annexing Canada.

“Following the change in the US administration in early 2025 and the implementation of America First policies, Canadian travel sentiment shifted abruptly,” said authors of the report by Statistics Canada, the country’s national statistics agency.

Total US travel spending in 2025 amounted to \$18.8bn, down from \$22.1bn in 2024. In contrast, Canadian spending on travel abroad, excluding the US, grew by \$3.6bn in 2025, to a total of \$22.8bn. Canadian visits to Europe increased by nearly 14% compared with 2024, while visits to Asia increased by almost 17%.

Those increases offered a stark contrast to the dwindling US visits. Overall in 2025, return trips to Canada from the US by vehicle and by plane dropped by about one quarter compared with 2024. Looking at 2026 data so far, Statistics Canada said the drop in leisure travel to the US was continuing. The figures signalled “a persistent shift away from the United States by Canadian residents”.

Mexico, Brazil and US Democrats blamed for World Cup 'anti-Argentina campaign'

Facundo Iglesia Buenos Aires
Tiago Rogero Rio de Janeiro

More than a week has passed since Ferran Torres scored the extra-time goal that gave Spain its second World Cup, but – at least for Argentina's president – the tournament is not over: Javier Milei has claimed that a coordinated "anti-Argentina campaign" was behind criticism of the country's team, accusations of racism among its fans and conspiracy theories alleging that Lionel Messi's side was secretly being favoured by Fifa.

Now, the far-right president has taken the narrative a step further, alleging that the supposed campaign was financed by the US Democratic party and the governments of Brazil and Mexico.

"It was the work of progressive minds who do not want the ideas of freedom to succeed," claimed the self-styled libertarian in an interview with a local radio station on Sunday.

He went on to claim that the "government of Brazil", led by its leftwing president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, had allegedly provided the largest share of the funding.

Analysts in Argentina said Milei had embraced the narrative as a distraction from his declining popularity, while others argued that the "real anti-Argentina campaign" was the one the president was waging "with his chainsaw" austerity plan.

Yet the narrative has gained traction, even reaching people who do not support Milei. Pablo Torres, a 52-year-old bookseller from Buenos Aires who "never voted for him and never would", said there had been a social media "bombardment" against the country that left him feeling "outrage" and "disgust".

He said some of the accusations of racism had come from "great colonial powers that enslaved people, trafficked enslaved people and decimated populations", adding: "They denied the existence of the black population in Argentina, and ignored our idiosyncrasies and our history ... We are a welcoming home for all nations."



During the tournament, incidents involving racist behaviour by some Argentinian supporters drew widespread attention.

Hours before the final, the US actor Samuel L Jackson posted an Instagram story that said: "Dear black people, please do not cheer or root for Argentina to win the Fifa World Cup. Argentina has historically been one of, if not the most, racist countries in the world."

The post prompted reactions even from human rights organisations such as Amnesty International Argentina, which acknowledged racism in the country but criticised "reducing the country to a stereotype".

Milei, meanwhile, posted that the criticism could be attributed to Argentina's opposition, which had "validated the woke movement that is now accusing us of being racist". Over the weekend, he also decided to blame Brazil – while he was on Brazilian soil.

▲ Javier Milei, the president of Argentina, dances with his country's national team jersey at a convention in São Paulo, Brazil, which endorsed

the candidacy of Flávio Bolsonaro, below, for president of Brazil

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALLISON SALES/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; JEAN CARNIEL/REUTERS



Dawn raids in Naples to remove umbrellas reserving beach spots

► Police seized 40 items in Torre del Greco, such as umbrellas, loungers and deckchairs, which had been left to save a prime spot on the beach for the next day

PHOTOGRAPH: KIRILL NIKITIN/ALAMY



Angela Giuffrida
Rome

Authorities in a coastal suburb of Naples seized umbrellas, loungers and deckchairs during a dawn sweep of a beach in an attempt to crack down on the growing trend of people attempting to reserve prime spots overnight.

Torre del Greco's port authority said coastguard staff and police had collected 40 items as part of a national beach and lake safety operation that targets people labelled by the Italian press as *furbetti dell'ombrellone*, or umbrella cheats.

The port authority said the sweep at Laghetto, a popular, free-access beach unlike the private concessions

that dominate much of Italy's coastline during the summer, was carried out after numerous complaints about equipment being left unattended for days on end.

The operation discovered "unattended chairs, umbrellas and small tables that were continuously occupying the beach, effectively reserving a spot for the owners' return".

"It is a practice that recurs each summer, but it is expressly prohibited," the port authority said, adding that "occupying the beach in this

80%

Proportion of the coastline that the town of Bacoli, near Naples, aimed to make available for public use

On Saturday, the Argentinian president attended the launch of the presidential campaign of the far-right senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the son of the former president Jair Bolsonaro and Lula's main challenger in October's presidential election.

In his speech, as well as calling Lula a "thief" and a "prisoner" – prompting a strong reaction from the Brazilian government – Milei said: "If you examine the data from the recent anti-Argentina campaign, the place from which the most attacks came was Brazil." He reinforced the claim on Sunday, this time adding Mexico and the US Democratic party.

The digital anthropologist Mercedes Máspero analysed more than 2m posts on social media and wrote that she had found "some undeniable patterns" of orchestration such as the repeated use of variations of "disgusting human beings" in different languages. Even so, it was "a tough call" to describe it as coordinated.

Natalia Aruguete, a researcher at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council who specialises in social media and political agendas, said she had seen "no evidence of a large-scale coordinated operation", despite "a hostile, widespread and transnational conversation centred on Argentina".

She added: "Brazil had a significant presence [in those messages], particularly in the conversation about racism, but ... Milei's accusation of alleged Brazilian involvement was not backed up by any public evidence."

Some critics said that the last time the idea of such a campaign was propagated by the state was during the brutal 1976-83 dictatorship, whose crimes Milei has repeatedly downplayed. During the 1978 World Cup, hosted by Argentina, the military junta claimed that criticism of the regime's human rights violations was part of an "anti-Argentina campaign".

Aruguete said Milei had turned a "diverse online conversation" into a political conflict that fits his narrative of a "culture war" against the left, at a time when his administration is facing "internal deterioration": inflation appears to be under control, but rising unemployment and corruption have hurt the president's popularity.

The narrative that Argentinians are all victims of an orchestrated campaign by leftwing foreign governments "allows Milei to shift the focus of the debate away from his own governance issues and on to an external adversary", said Aruguete.

manner violates the regulations governing the management of maritime public domain areas".

Those leaving behind their beach equipment after sunset risk fines of up to €500 (£425) while reclaiming the confiscated personal belongings involves a bureaucratic ordeal.

There was a similar blitz on a beach in Puglia this month as well as on others in Liguria and in Sardinia.

Italian beachgoers are battling to reclaim "free beaches" from private concessions, which, especially in Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Puglia, are common. One such battle was recently won in Bacoli, near Naples, with the town saying the municipality aimed to make more than 80% of the local coastline free or equipped for public use.

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FTSE 100 +89.27	All share +45.18	Dow Indl +672.28	Nikkei 225 -2566.27	£/€ 1.1674	£/\$ 1.3292
10871.02	5839.12	52882.36	62364.92	-0.0023	-0.0010

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

South Korea's stock market down 11.5% amid AI sell-off

Lauren Almeida
Graeme Wearden

The sell-off in AI stocks has intensified, driving South Korea's stock market down to its lowest level in three months.

Investors continued to ditch chip stocks yesterday, amid rising concerns about the huge amount of borrowing among artificial intelligence companies to fund their datacentre expansion plans.

The South Korean semiconductor companies SK Hynix and Samsung Electronics fell by more than 10%, dragging the country's Kospi share index down by 11.5% to its lowest point since mid-April.

US chip stocks extended their recent losses when Wall Street opened yesterday, with Intel, Advanced Micro Devices, Sandisk, Western

Digital Corp and Seagate Technology all down by more than 4%.

The Nasdaq 100 index of leading tech stocks fell by as much as 1.8% at one point, briefly taken into market correction territory with stocks more than 10% below their early June record high. They later rebounded to settle roughly flat on the day.

Apple bucked the trend, rising to briefly become the second company to pass the \$5tn (£3.76tn) valuation mark as investors losing confidence in AI stocks sought a safe haven.

Analysts attributed the tech sell-off to renewed worries over AI investment spending, and competition from cheaper Chinese companies, after a report by The Information that China had begun mass production of homegrown deep ultraviolet (DUV) chip-making tools.

"We believe the market was likely spooked by the progress of China's

chip-making equipment capabilities, and was worried that this progress would threaten the competitive position of global chip making and chip equipment leaders," said Jing Jie Yu, an equity analyst at Morningstar, adding that the sell-off was "largely a kneejerk reaction and overdone".

On Monday, shares in the Chinese memory chip maker CXMT rose by 466% when it floated on the Shanghai stock exchange, underlining China's drive to create its own AI supply chain.

Investors may also be growing jittery about the "circular funding" at the heart of the industry, through

\$5tn

Apple valuation as investors sought a safe haven, amid worries about China and 'circular funding' in AI

which AI firms finance one another. On Monday, the Wall Street Journal reported that Nvidia was in talks with OpenAI about providing \$250bn (£188bn) for a massive datacentre project in Ohio. Backing from Nvidia, which has an investment grade credit rating, could make it less expensive to raise funding for the project.

News of the talks knocked Nvidia's shares on Monday; they closed 5% lower, while the cost of insuring the chip company's debt against default using a credit default swap (CDS) rose.

Some analysts have suggested that Beijing is providing US companies with cheap AI systems as part of a tech war with the US.

Danni Hewson, the head of financial analysis at the stockbroker AJ Bell, said: "Nerves about the huge amount of cash being splashed have been building for months. Investors will be keen to hear how those massive sums of cash have been utilised by mega caps like Microsoft and Meta and, crucially, what returns are being made on those investments."

London and European exchanges bucked the trend. The FTSE 100 rose 89 points to 10,871, while the Paris CAC 40 rose 52 points to 8,458.

Calls for tax raid on banks as Barclays' profits soar

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

Andy Burnham was urged yesterday to launch a tax raid on UK banks as Barclays reported a 30% increase in its half-year bonus pool after a rise in profits.

Fresh corporate filings showed the bank put £1.3bn towards its bonus pool for the first half of the year. That figure, which included annual and deferred bonuses, was up from £1bn last year.

That pool will continue to accumulate through the second half of this year and could lead to more generous bonuses when Barclays makes final pay decisions by the end of February.

The increase in the bonus pool follows a rise in pre-tax profits for the second quarter to £3.3bn, up 31% year on year and bringing Barclays' half-year profits to £6.1bn, up 17%.

That also allowed the bank to announce new payouts for shareholders, including a £1bn share buy-back and £800m in dividends.

The strong results further emboldened calls for a tax raid on UK lenders, with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) saying Burnham's plans to tackle the cost of living crisis required "more support in the months ahead", particularly from big banks.

The TUC general secretary, Paul Nowak, said: "Big banks like Barclays are raking it in while working people and local businesses are struggling."

"This is a chance for the new prime minister and chancellor to show whose side they're on. It's time to increase the bank surcharge and tax banks to bring down energy bills."

Barclays executives told a conference call with journalists they were taxed much higher than their foreign peers, pointing to statistics from the lobby group UK Finance showing that UK banks were taxed at 46.4% when employment taxes and VAT were taken into account. That compares with a 38.9% rate in Frankfurt and 27.9% in New York.

"We think the track record that we and the other banks have in terms of supporting UK growth and indeed leaning into UK lending in the way we have is really important for the health of the economy," said the chief financial officer, Anna Cross. "We hope that will be considered."

The Barclays chief executive, CS Venkatakrishnan, said he met the new chancellor, John Healey, last week. "I was very pleased to hear his commitment to growth in every postcode," he said, adding: "He also said that he wants British businesses to be successful."



▲ A visualisation of GSK's new R&D centre on the Cambridge biomedical campus. The drugmaker will move more than 1,000 of its scientists there
ILLUSTRATION: GSK

GSK to cut jobs while investing £400m in drug research centre

Joanna Partridge

The British drugmaker GSK is to announce sweeping job cuts as part of a £1.9bn cost-cutting programme to pay for a £400m investment in UK life sciences over the next three years as it looks to develop drugs more quickly under its new chief executive.

The pharmaceuticals company

announced yesterday it would move more than 1,000 of its scientists to its new research and development centre on the Cambridge biomedical campus. It will close its R&D site in Stevenage in Hertfordshire by 2029, while upgrading its R&D laboratories at nearby Ware and moving some employees there.

Luke Miels, the GSK chief executive, said: "This investment will accelerate our R&D and help us

deliver new, competitive products. It integrates GSK further into one of the world's leading centres of knowledge and demonstrates the attractiveness of the UK's life sciences ecosystem."

GSK's new Cambridge site is on one of the largest biomedical campuses in Europe. More than 22,000 people working in life sciences and more than 470 biopharma, biotech and AI companies are based there.

GSK said its labs at the 28,000 sq metre (300,000-sq ft) site would support its focus on research in areas including oncology, respiratory medicine, hepatology, vaccines and HIV.

The move will bring more scientists to the "golden triangle" of

Cambridge, Oxford and London, where GSK said its teams would have access to a "world-class ecosystem of biomedical research, patient care and academia".

Andy Burnham described the investment as a "vote of confidence in British business".

GSK's announcement comes just months after its rival AstraZeneca, Britain's biggest drugmaker, made a surprise U-turn and announced a £300m investment in the UK, including a £200m expansion in Cambridge.

Shares in GSK rose by 6% after its announcement, making it one of the biggest risers on the London stock market yesterday.

Business view

Nils Pratley



GSK's investment in Cambridge seems like a gift for Burnham – but it's also about the cluster

Andy Burnham, seizing the political gift of GSK splashing out £400m on a shiny new research and development centre in Cambridge, described it as “a vote of confidence in British business”.

For positive vibes, it definitely beats the early pharma news received by his predecessor as prime minister. That was the painful tale of how AstraZeneca, frustrated by indecision in the Treasury, cancelled its intended £450m expansion of a vaccine plant in Speke in Liverpool.

In reality, GSK's investment in Britain is a specific one in Cambridge. The group's historic

Stevenage facility will close and most of the scientists (or as many as want to) will move to the Fens.

One shouldn't be surprised. Life sciences companies increasingly gather in clusters. Cambridge – thanks to its university, Addenbrooke's hospital, various science institutes and a healthy biotech and biopharma startup scene – is a genuine world-class rival to Boston and Basel.

The Cambridge biomedical campus is the natural place for GSK to be in the UK in the interests of “acceleration” of research and development. Only a cynic would suggest that literal proximity to AstraZeneca's facilities may come in handy for a future merger.

The switch of UK research location is the most eye-catching

big decision by Luke Miels, GSK's chief executive since the start of the year, but yesterday's first-half numbers contained three sources of encouragement for shareholders.

First, GSK thinks it can put at least 20 potential medicines into late-stage trials this year, an increase from 10 at the last count. Part of the boost flows from the near-£8bn acquisition of the US-based cancer specialist Nuvalent last month. But the rest probably owes something to Miels's focus on which drug programmes should be backed harder and which cut. If the 20-plus target indicates more ruthlessness in prioritisation, investors will applaud. It is easy to talk, as Miels has done, about displaying “scientific courage”, but you still need candidates to come through the drug pipeline in order to make it happen.

Second, Miels surprised the market with a plan to cut £1.9bn of annual costs by 2029. Even for a company the size of GSK, that's a big number to find from the general wash of procurement, frontline sales forces, AI efficiencies and a leaner manufacturing presence amid the shift from general medicines to specialist drugs.

Third, the dark cloud hanging over GSK – the 2028-30 expiry date for patents on the HIV medicine



▲ The Cambridge biomedical campus is a natural home for GSK

Shareholders know not to underestimate scope for disappointment but the 2031 revenue target gets more credible with every telling

dolutegravir, which accounts for about a fifth of group sales – looks less threatening if its latest forecasting proves correct.

A critical line in the results was the prediction that operating profits margins would be “stable to improving” even during the patent crunch. Thanks to the intended cost savings, that is a notably clearer statement than the group has offered before. Meanwhile, the target of hitting £40bn-plus of revenue in 2031 is “on track” with “accelerating growth” thereafter.

Long-standing GSK shareholders know from experience never to underestimate the scope for disappointment. The past 20 years have witnessed many false dawns; improvements under Miels's predecessor, Emma Walmsley, ran into bad luck in the form of US litigation over a heartburn drug from the 1990s.

But the tone has improved. It's still too soon to speak about GSK replicating AstraZeneca's remarkable 15-year blueprint for growth under Pascal Soriot (which also started with expansion in Cambridge). But the big pieces are falling into place. The 2031 revenue target gets more credible with every telling; the pipeline is fuller; the patent cliff is less daunting; the share price is perkier. Put the merger talk on hold.

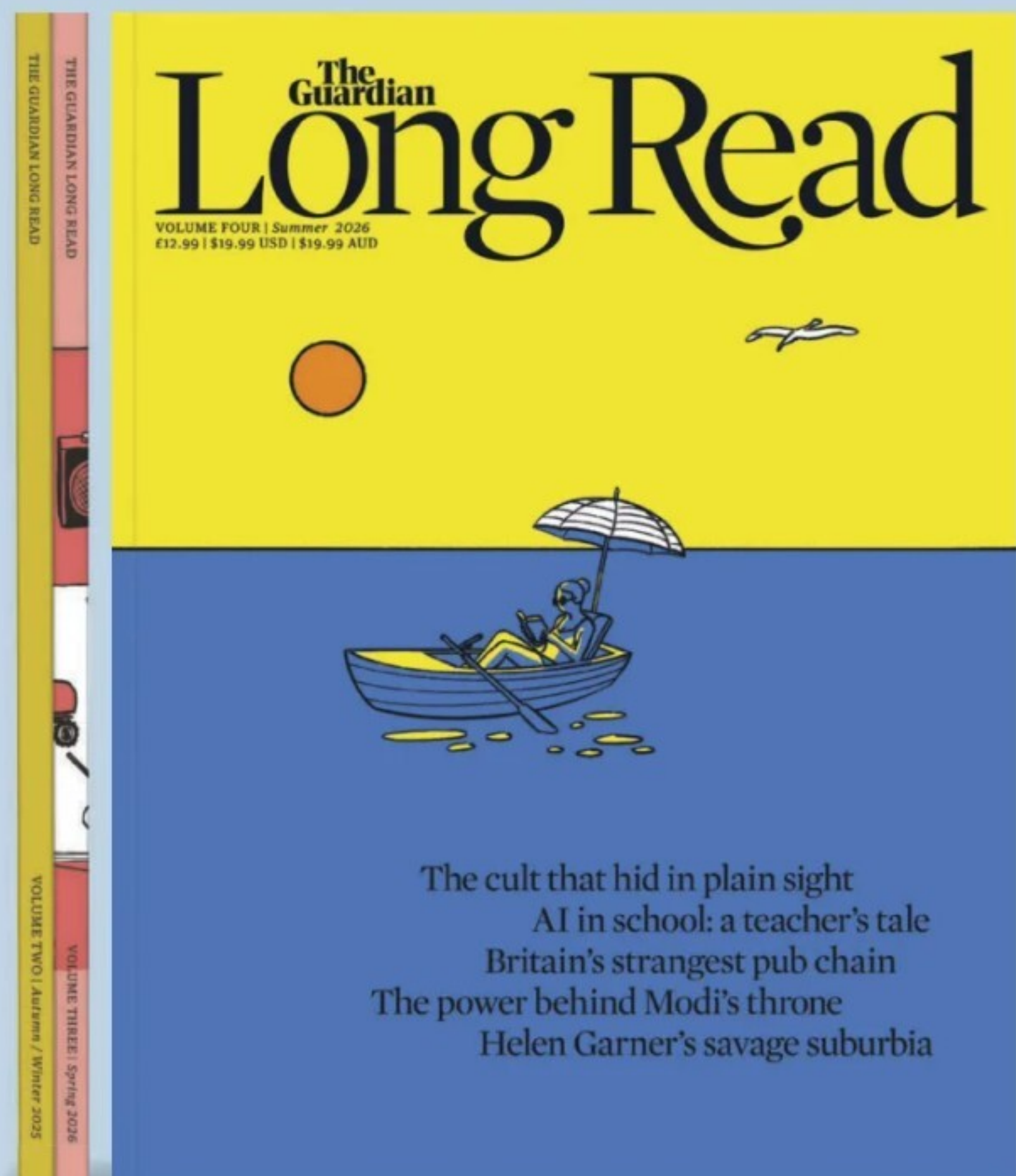
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War footing

Warhammer figures from the Grey Knights series by Games Workshop. The firm, based in Nottingham, is bulking up its plastic stockpile by £2m amid concerns over supply disruption during the Iran conflict.

PHOTOGRAPH:
PHOTIMAGEON/
ALAMY



Unilever warns of price rises for shoppers amid growing costs

Kalyeena Makortoff

Unilever has warned it will push through further price rises over the coming months as the Marmite, Dove and Hellmann's owner tries to recoup its own growing costs.

The company said that while the pace of price rises slowed in the second quarter, owing in part to World Cup-related discounts and efforts to stay competitive in Brazil, these were "temporary factors" and would not shield consumers for long.

The company told shareholders yesterday: "We expect underlying price growth to accelerate in the second half as commodity-driven pricing continues to land in market."

That could translate into higher profits for Unilever, depending on whether consumers keep buying its products despite the price rises. Unilever said in its release that its underlying sales rose by 5.8% in the second quarter, pushing turnover up 3.8% to €13bn (£11.1bn).

Victoria Scholar, the head of investment at Interactive Investor, said: "Consumers continued to demand Unilever's branded products, rather than switching to unbranded cheaper alternatives, despite cost of living pressures, proving the strength of Unilever products' brand loyalty."

Companies such as Unilever have been grappling with rising costs for ingredients and services owing to higher oil prices since March, when the US-Israeli war on Iran in effect

stopped tanker traffic through the strait of Hormuz.

Although oil prices have fluctuated amid temporary ceasefires, that has yet to lead to a sustained drop in costs for manufacturers, which are hoping to pass them on to customers.

UK inflation dropped by more than expected in June to 2.6%, but City economists have warned that the Bank of England could be forced to tear up its economic forecasts and raise interest rates later this year if oil prices rise above \$100 a barrel.

Mohamed El-Erian, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund, suggested a sustained increase in oil prices to \$90 a barrel could be enough to rewrite UK policymakers' forecasts.

He said: "Should oil prices remain above \$90 a barrel, an important 'if', then headline inflation would face significant upward pressure.

"This, in turn, would heighten concerns over immediate indirect effects, including rising food prices driven by diesel transportation costs, and broader second-round effects over time."

That could put further pressure on customers buying products made by Unilever, which has factories across the country - making Pot Noodle in Crumlin and Hellmann's, Marmite and Colman's products in Burton-on-Trent.

Unilever indicated that its investment in marketing had paid off after sales growth beat expectations. Srinivas Phatak, Unilever's chief financial officer, said: "The days of underinvesting in our businesses are over."

It also raised its 2026 outlook, predicting underlying sales growth of between 4% and 5% in the second half of the year "led by pricing" - another indication of price rises.

Unilever's shares climbed by more than 8% yesterday.

Security firm linked to ICE reports slump in UK revenue

Jasper Jolly
Rob Davies

A private security company linked to Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in the United States reported a slump in UK revenues after losing an asylum centre contract - but it could make £500m managing the same facility until 2036.

Management & Training Corporation (MTC) said sales fell from £28.4m to £17.6m in 2025 after its contract to provide "security and care" at the heavily criticised Manston site in Kent ended in September.

An inquiry described Manston as "overcrowded, squalid and insanitary" between June and November 2022, when MTC took over provision of services for the Home Office.

The end of the contract last September pushed MTC UK to a £1.6m loss, Companies House filings show, against a profit of £1.3m in 2024.

But MTC Definitive, a joint venture that MTC UK majority owns, won a contract in May for processing people who arrive on small boats "from disembarkation through to dispersal".

The Irregular Migration Management Services contract runs for six years, with a possible four-year extension. It covers two asylum processing centres, Manston and the Western Jet Foil site in Dover.

Despite the loss, MTC UK's highest-paid director received £211,000 remuneration in 2025, a 5% rise.

The company is owned by an American parent based in Utah, which runs prisons and job training centres in the US. Its facilities include detention centres used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which has been criticised for its brutality during Trump's presidency.

The new UK small boats contract is worth an initial £462m but could be worth up to £539m if it is extended to 10 years.

MTC said it was committed to delivering a safe and secure environment at its centres and decisions relating to the operation of the Manston site sat outside its contractual remit. It said its US work predated the Trump administration.

Johnson & Johnson to pay \$5.5bn over baby powder cancer claims

Reuters

Johnson & Johnson has said it will pay an estimated \$5.5bn (£4.1bn) to resolve tens of thousands of lawsuits alleging its baby powder and other talc products caused ovarian cancer, in a landmark deal that could end a decade-long legal battle.

The settlement covers about



▲ The company stopped selling talc-based baby powder in the US in 2020

76,000 claims, and the US multinational had previously settled most of the cases alleging its talc contained asbestos and caused mesothelioma.

Law firms representing the plaintiffs said it was a good deal. It must be accepted by 95% of ovarian cancer claimants before it becomes final.

Johnson & Johnson's vice-president of litigation, Erik Haas, said the claims were "meritless".

"While we are confident the company would have ultimately prevailed with further litigation, as it has in the vast majority of cases tried to date, this resolution allows the company to put this matter behind it and remain focused on its mission to

develop medicines and devices that save lives," Haas said.

Johnson & Johnson expects to pay \$3bn in 2027 and make further payments in 2028. But the deal could be worth more depending on how many people participate in the settlement.

Christopher Seeger, a lawyer who represents about 2,500 clients with talc claims, said Johnson & Johnson could ultimately pay \$7bn or more.

The deal assigns specific values to qualifying ovarian cancer claims but does not cap Johnson & Johnson's total payout, Seeger said.

The company, headquartered in New Jersey, won a significant court victory last week when a federal judge

cast doubt on individual plaintiffs' ability to prove that talc specifically caused their ovarian cancer.

Johnson & Johnson has long denied its talc products caused cancer, saying the talc was safe and did not contain asbestos. The company stopped selling talc-based baby powder in the US in 2020.

But litigation resumed in March 2025 after having been put on hold for more than three years while the company unsuccessfully pursued a strategy known as the "Texas two step", filing three bankruptcies through a shell-company subsidiary in an effort to settle the cases. Each bankruptcy ended in dismissal.

Weather

Wednesday 29 July 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today

Sunny

Mist

Fog

Sunny intervals

Hazy

Mostly cloudy

Overcast/dull

Sunny showers

Sunny and heavy showers

Light showers

Rain

Sleet

Light snow

Snow showers

Heavy snow

Ice

Thundery rain

Thundery showers

Temperature, °C

Wind speed, mph

Windy

35C

30

25

20

15

10

5

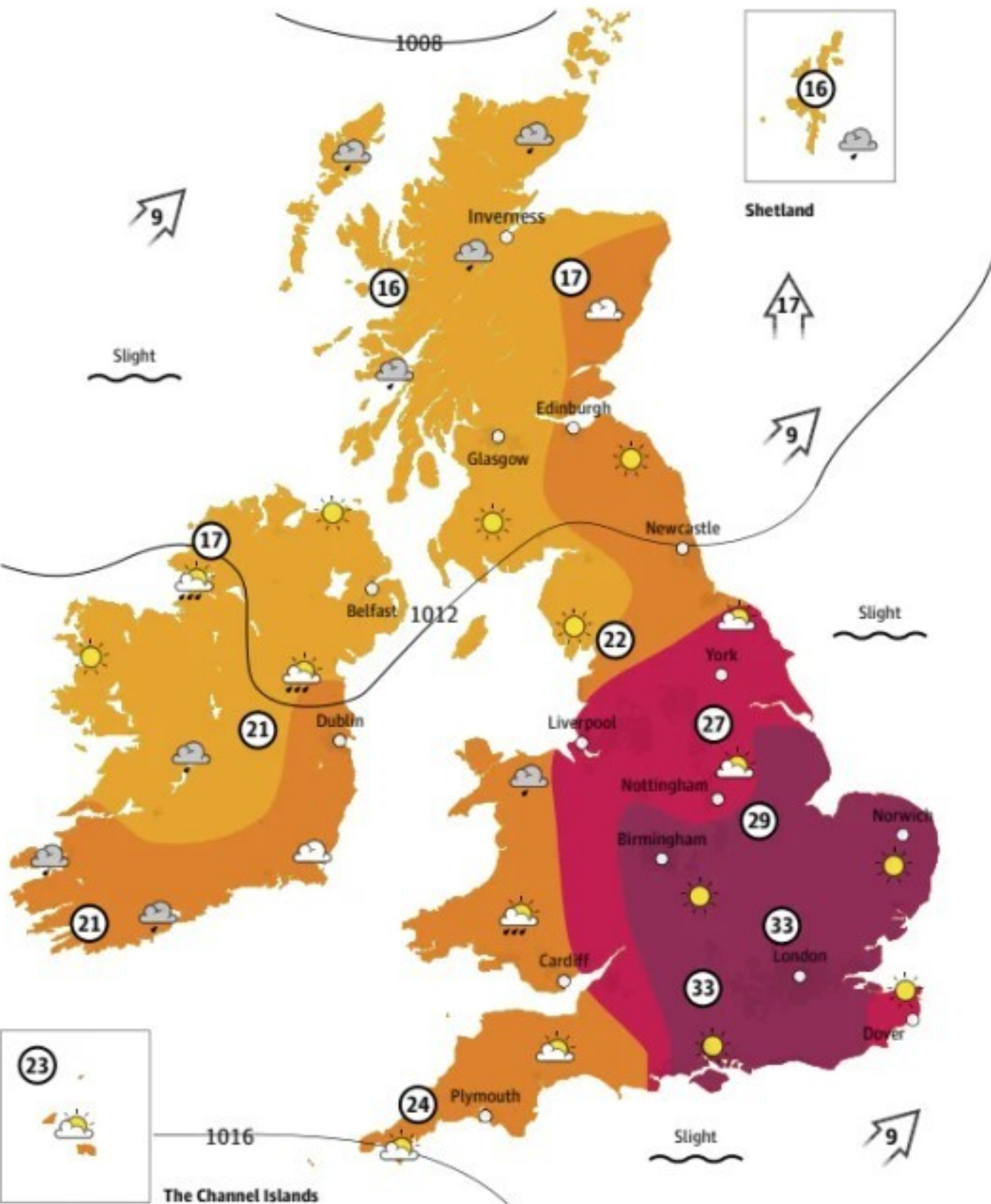
0

-5

-10

-15

-20



Forecast

Low **15** High **21**

Tomorrow

Low **10** High **20**

Friday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

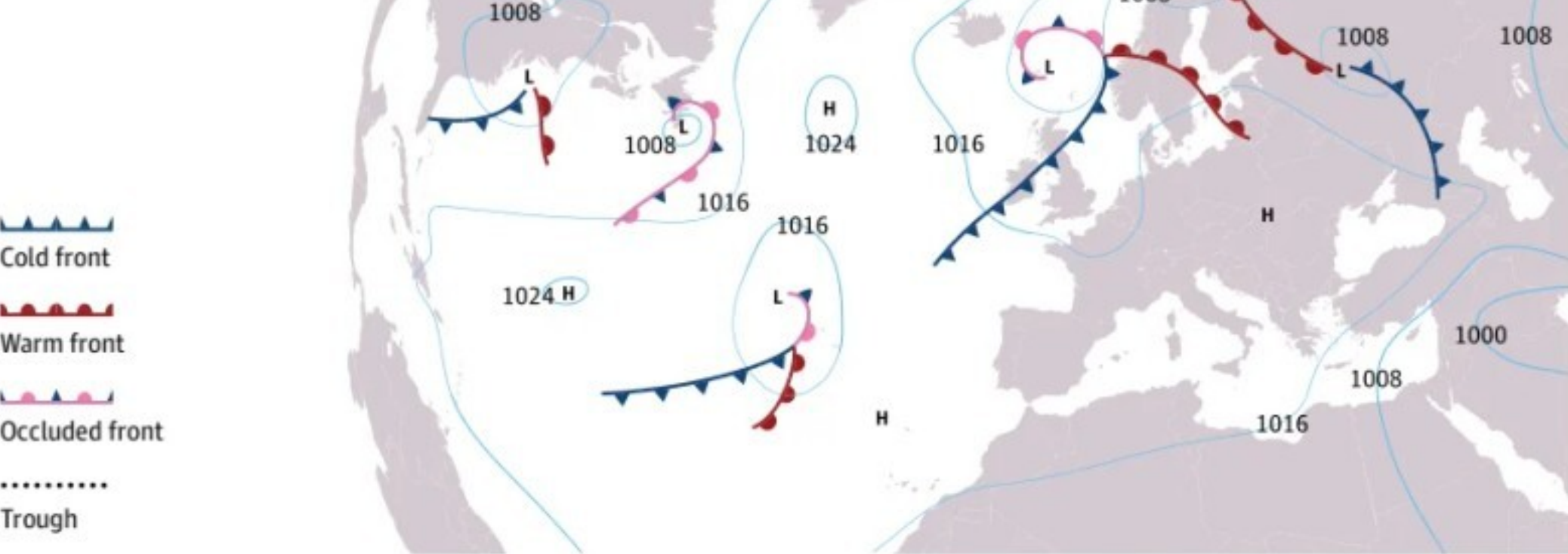
Latest	429.21
27 Jul 2026	429.21
Weekly average	428.72
19 Jul 2026	428.72
28 Jul 2025	427.58
28 Jul 2016	403.35
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

London	Lows and highs: 17 / 33	Precipitation: 0%	Air pollution: Low
Manchester	15 / 26	25%	Low
Edinburgh	10 / 21	90%	Low
Belfast	11 / 18	85%	Low
Birmingham	16 / 30	5%	Low
Brighton	16 / 24	0%	Low
Bristol	17 / 24	5%	Low
Cardiff	16 / 24	5%	Low
Newcastle	12 / 23	55%	Low
Penzance	16 / 21	55%	Low

Atlantic front



High tides

Aberdeen	0102	3.9m	1336	3.8m
Avonmouth	0657	11.6m	1917	12.1m
Barrow	1126	8.2m	2336	8.6m
Belfast	1111	3.1m	2323	3.4m
Cobh	0515	3.7m	1736	3.8m
Cromer	0616	4.7m	1853	4.5m
Dover	1105	6.2m	2321	6.1m
Dublin	1137	3.6m	2336	3.9m
Galway	0510	4.5m	1719	4.8m
Greenock	0009	3.3m	1222	3.0m
Harwich	--	--	1144	3.8m
Holyhead	1023	5.0m	2230	5.4m
Hull	0556	6.9m	1833	6.6m
Leith	0221	5.1m	1449	5.1m
Liverpool	1108	8.5m	2317	8.9m

London Bridge	0138	6.7m	1357	6.6m
Lossiemouth	--	--	1208	3.6m
Milford Haven	0606	6.2m	1822	6.6m
Newquay	0457	6.1m	1713	6.4m
North Shields	0309	4.7m	1541	4.6m
Oban	0543	3.5m	1802	3.8m
Penzance	0432	4.9m	1647	5.2m
Plymouth	0530	4.8m	1744	5.2m
Portsmouth	1135	4.4m	2338	4.4m
Southport	1043	8.2m	2252	8.6m
Stornoway	0657	4.1m	1900	4.6m
Portland	0637	1.7m	1853	2.0m
Whitby	0343	5.2m	1613	5.1m
Wick	1127	3.0m	2328	3.3m
Workington	1132	7.4m	2343	7.8m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises 0519

Sun sets 2053

Moon rises 2106

Moon sets 0442

Full Moon 29 July

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2132 to 0532
Birm'ham	2104 to 0524
Brighton	2051 to 0524
Bristol	2103 to 0532
Carlisle	2119 to 0517
Cork	2128 to 0553
Dublin	2126 to 0538
Glasgow	2131 to 0519
Harlech	2115 to 0532
Inverness	2138 to 0508
London	2053 to 0521
M'chester	2110 to 0522
Newcastle	2115 to 0512
Norwich	2053 to 0511
Penzance	2110 to 0548

Birdwatch

I wake early on these summer mornings. And now the birds in my garden have mostly fallen silent, only one is still serenading me at this hour: the aptly named song thrush. Its measured repetitions - which this particular bird has provided without a break since the turn of the year - are unmistakable.

Whenever I hear a song thrush, I'm taken back in time. First, to my childhood, when the earliest sign of spring was thrushes singing from the roofs of our suburban housing estate as I walked home from school on a February afternoon.

Then, still further, to a story my grandmother used to tell me about her father, Edgar Snow. On summer evenings before the first world war, while he walked home from work, he would hear the sound of a bird. It seemed to be speaking directly to him: "Snowy, Snowy - pay the rent, pay the rent." It was only many years later, long after my grandmother had died, that I realised the identity of that songster. No other bird speaks to us quite so directly, nor so insistently.

And now, more than a century on, whenever I hear a song thrush I feel a connection with the great-grandfather I never knew, through the clear, pure sound that greets me as I start each day. **Stephen Moss**

Around the world

Algiers	32	Lisbon	30
Ams'dam	32	Madrid	40
Athens	35	Malaga	31
Auckland	14	Melb'rne	13
B Aires	13	Mexico C	23
Bangkok	32	Miami	34
Barcelona	31	Milan	37
Basra	47	Mombasa	29
Beijing	35	Moscow	18
Berlin	30	Mumbai	30
Bermuda	28	N Orleans	35
Brussels	35	Nairobi	23
Budapest	33	New Delhi	33
C'hagen	24	New York	24
Cairo	38	Oslo	25
Cape Town	20	Paris	39
Chicago	28	Perth	19
Corfu	35	Prague	31
Dakar	31	Reykjavik	14
Dhaka	30	Rio de J	31
Dublin	21	Rome	35
Florence	39	Shanghai	36
Gibraltar	27	Singapore	32
H Kong	28	Stockh'm	22
Harare	23	Strasb'g	38
Helsinki	23	Sydney	18
Istanbul	30	Tel Aviv	32
Jo'burg	17	Tenerife	26
K Lumpur	32	Tokyo	33
K'mandu	28	Toronto	25
Kabul	33	Vancouv'r	21
Kingston	34	Vienna	33
Kolkata	30	Warsaw	25
L Angeles	31	Wash'ton	30
Lagos	27	Well'ton	13
Lima	25	Zurich	36

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Analysis

Jeremy Whittle

Thomas and rebranded Ineos team face some harsh truths in wake of Tour de France misery

Cashes, punctures and injuries ensured the 2026 Tour de France campaign was one of the worst for the beleaguered Netcompany Ineos team. From the first stage, when Dave Brailsford's team came close to winning the team time trial in Montjuic, the 2026 Tour was, in the words of their director of racing, Geraint Thomas, "tough going".

Thomas, who has taken Brailsford's place as the team's frontman, said: "I'm happy to not be racing any more, because I suffered way too much. But it's good to still be involved."

It was a baptism of fire for Thomas in his first Tour managing his riders, as he had to hastily reimagine his lineup after Oscar Onley, the leader, was ruled out by injury. That led to a rapid realignment of the team's goals.

The optimism fuelled by Ineos's acquisition of Onley, who finished fourth overall in 2025, and the arrival of a new co-sponsor, Netcompany, has dissipated quickly. The Scot was injured in June and forced to miss the Tour, which scuppered Thomas's best-laid plans. "We were there or thereabouts," Thomas said of his riders. "The team time trial everyone wanted to win and believed we could win. We were close, and we've been there, but just not quite clicked."

More galling, perhaps, were the serial punctures and the sight of Remco Evenepoel, of the Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe team, riding to his best Tour finish in second place. The Olympic road race and time-trial champion, a friend of Thomas, had long been connected to a move to Brailsford's team but the deal for

him to join fell through. "With all the changes going on in that team, there were delays and I couldn't really wait any more," Evenepoel said last winter. Instead, Ineos signed Onley, but his 2026 season has never really got started. With the Tour over, his next goal is likely to be the Vuelta a España.

Without Onley as a podium contender, the emphasis shifted and Egan Bernal, the Tour winner in 2019, was brought in to boost the team's climbing skills. The French signing Kévin Vauquelin failed to repeat the successes of the previous summer, leaving Thomas and his riders targeting stage wins. But the chances of achieving them were reduced by the domination of Tadej Pogacar and his UAE Emirates team, allied to a tougher course and higher average speeds.

Thomas admitted there had been "a lot of learning on the job" for him. "It's easy to talk about [winning] stages but there are so few anyway that it is tough. But it's the Tour, it's not supposed to be easy." By the time Thomas and his riders got to the foot of the double-header of finishes on Alpe d'Huez, their race was about survival. "Without being defeatist, you're not exactly racing 'Pog' on days like that," the 2018 Tour winner said. "Racing evolves and you need to adapt with it. Everyone's been looking for opportunities because they're few and far between."

A decade ago, as Team Sky, Chris Froome led the team to an emphatic overall win in Paris while British riders, spearheaded by Mark Cavendish, took seven stage wins. That success now seems a different era, with Froome retired, record climbing speeds being set on a regular basis, and Pogacar dominating almost every race he starts.

Of the Slovene, Thomas agreed that challenging the five-time winner was a daunting task. "I think everyone knew that he was on another level. It was only Jonas [Vingegaard] who really believed he could do it. Racing is all in the head. If you go off it, it's so hard to switch it back on. Everyone is so good now that you can't afford to do that."



▲ Geraint Thomas endured a baptism of fire managing his riders



Racing

Scandinavia triumphs in loose horse drama

Greg Wood
Goodwood

Scandinavia confirmed the form of his Ascot Gold Cup defeat of Trawlerman with a wide-margin win in the Group One Goodwood Cup yesterday, but the bare result does not tell the full story of a race in which a riderless horse led the field for much of the way and veered across the leaders with three furlongs to run.

The drama began at the start, when Hector Crouch was unshipped from Amiloc, the jockey catching his foot on the stalls as the horse jinked to the right. The gelding then worked his way to the head of the field with nearly 12 furlongs still to run and, having veered wide on the home turn, drifted across Scandinavia and Trawlerman soon afterwards.

Scandinavia, the favourite, was

half a length behind Trawlerman at the time and Ryan Moore, his rider, did not stop riding but William Buick, on Trawlerman, lost all momentum. Scandinavia's eventual winning margin of eight and a half lengths – with the riderless Amiloc still in front of him – suggests that the result was not affected, but the crowd was certainly denied the spectacle of two top-class stayers battling to the line.

"It's significant," Buick said. "It's hard to say how significant but he's a horse who is a Gold Cup winner [in 2025], so he stays."

"To try to manoeuvre around a loose horse is never easy and my worry was if I found myself on his outside, I could give away a lot of ground and be on the stands side, theoretically. I went the shortest route and he only got in my way in the most important part of the race."

Moore, meanwhile, felt that

◀ Scandinavia makes his way home behind a loose horse at Goodwood
ANDREW MATTHEWS/PA

the sight of a horse galloping in a clear lead might have benefited his mount. "It was nice for him to have a horse to follow all the way," Moore said. "He probably thinks he got beat. His stride never shortened, he just kept galloping all the way to the line. He's a high-class horse and hopefully there's a few more good days to come."

Lake Forest, who finished fast under Cieren Fallon to take the Group Two Lennox Stakes by a neck, could attempt to complete a remarkable double in the Group One Sussex Stakes here today.

"I don't see why he can't come here again tomorrow, that's the plan," Maureen Haggas, the wife of Lake Forest's trainer, William, said.

"We'll see how he is. If we're happy with him, then why not? He's a five-year-old gelding and he hasn't got to travel anywhere. We don't know about [the step up to] a mile, but he stays seven well."

Earlier on the card, Kaiya Fraser came up with an early candidate for ride of the meeting as he threaded Oliver Cole's Dr Rascal through a narrow gap against the far rail to take the Group Two Vintage Stakes by half a length.

Fraser, who was born and raised in Hackney, did not sit on a horse until enrolling on a foundation course for apprentice riders at the British Racing School in Newmarket as a 16-year-old. "It means everything, this is what we wake up for every morning," Fraser said.

"I've put so much hard work in to get where I am today, and all the people around who have helped me – my agent James Forrest, and all the owners and trainers who put me up – I'm very grateful to them and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them."

Echo to follow in hoofprints of Frankel

Greg Wood
TV races guide

At Newmarket in May, Bow Echo was the most impressive winner of the 2,000 Guineas since Frankel, and he will further enhance his status as one of the finest milers of recent decades if he can extend his unbeaten record to six starts in the Group One Sussex Stakes at Glorious Goodwood today.

The parallels with the greatest Flat horse of recent decades do not end there, as Bow Echo's next start was a less convincing success in the

St James's Palace Stakes at Royal Ascot. Frankel soon set the record straight, though, with a decisive success on the Sussex Downs, and there are sound reasons to think Bow Echo can do the same.

Bow Echo was hampered at Ascot and was lit up before being forced wide. He then held on by a short-head from Gstaad, who was nearly three lengths adrift in second at Newmarket.

Gstaad is back for a third tilt at Bow Echo today, but the pacy four-year-old Opera Ballo may be a bigger danger from a low draw at a frontrunner's track.

Bow Echo (4.10), though, has several pounds to spare on Charlie Appleby's colt on the ratings, has also drawn well in one and has scope to improve further after just five starts.

Goodwood 1.50 Tierra Del Toro has been better than the bare result on his last two starts and should be

Greg Wood's tips

Goodwood 1.50 Tierra Del Toro (nb) 2.25 Wild Blossom 3.00 Zanthos 3.35 Adonius 4.10 Bow Echo 5.00 Silver Wraith 5.40 Zarathos (nap)
Redcar 2.05 Kats Bob 2.40 Areti 3.15 Leopards Rock 3.50 Homestrait 4.20 Stormy Pearl 4.50 That's My Boy Luke
Sandown 5.45 Happy Banner 6.15 Justcallemepete 6.50 King High 7.25 Galba 8.00 Ammoonny 8.30 Kakirra
Leicester 5.55 Fairy Well 6.27 My Maria 7.02 Moving Shadow 7.37 Calafrio 8.10 Clocker 8.40 Spiritoftheblues

less susceptible to traffic problems in this smaller field.

Goodwood 2.25 Karl Burke's **Wild Blossom** should appreciate the drop in grade after finishing mid-division at Royal Ascot.

Goodwood 3.00 The impressive Rockfel winner last year, **Zanthos**, has failed to fire so far this season but this return to seven furlongs should suit.

Goodwood 3.35 **Adonius** has had a break since his win at Chester in early May and will appreciate this speed test.

'I really can't believe that it is 50 years. Where has the time gone?'

The inaugural Women's Open champion Jenny Lee Smith on 1976 glory, Kevin Keegan and finding her secret twin

Ewan Murray

Golf commitments in the United States meant Jenny Lee Smith was unable to accept the North East Sports Personality of the Year award for 1982 in person. She attended the following year's event, this time to present the trophy to Kevin Keegan. His death last week shocked Smith, prompting her to reflect back on that time. It delivers a snapshot of Smith's sporting status at a time when Keegan was wooing Tyneside.

"It is very sad," Smith says of Keegan's death, aged 75. "We did a lot of work together because I was sponsored at the time by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, who did the same for the football team. He became a good friend and was such a lovely chap."

"When I was out on tour, they would send a taxi for my mother - who was an avid football supporter - and Kevin would always be asking where I was playing and what I was up to. When he became the manager, the football was magical."

Smith left Newcastle long ago but Newcastle has never left her. "It is still home. I am still a Geordie at heart, a Geordie in exile."

The difficulty with a story as multifaceted as hers is knowing where on earth to start. She rubbed shoulders with Keegan due to golfing excellence, with the coming days marking a noteworthy anniversary of her proudest moment. In 1976, at the inaugural Women's British Open, Smith emerged victorious. Fittingly, she will arrive at Royal Lytham & St Annes this week as a guest of the R&A. At the conclusion of what is now the Women's Open, Smith will present the prize to the tournament's leading amateur. This was her very status 50 years ago, meaning she could not even collect the £210 first prize. There had been serious doubt over her playing at Fulford - near York - at all.

"It was touch and go," Smith recalls. "I had a really bad chest infection just before the tournament and really still felt



◀ Jenny Lee Smith shows off the trophy after winning the 1976 Women's British Open at Fulford
PETER DAZELEY/
GETTY IMAGES

▼ Jenny Lee Smith in action at the Ladies' European Open at the Belfry in 1984; and (bottom) sharing a light-hearted moment with the 2023 Women's Open champion, Lilia Vu
OISIN KENIRY/R&A/
GETTY IMAGES



pretty groggy. I was in Newcastle, Fulford isn't far away, so my mother said to me: 'Don't withdraw. Just go and, if you feel ill, come home.' Then I went and won the thing, which was fabulous. I really can't believe that it is 50 years. Where has that time gone?

"I can still remember the last nine holes. In those days you had no scoreboards and you

'I lost my dad when I was 12. I found out I was adopted when cousins told me in an argument'

had to rely on whispers coming from the crowd to know what was happening on the rest of the course. After nine holes I was one behind Mary McKenna. I thought standing on the 18th tee, or rather I was told, that on the par five I needed a four to win. Actually that wasn't so but I took four anyway."

Her reward, besides a piece of history? "Just a strange wooden plinth with two candlesticks on it." The Women's Open champion this year will earn \$1.5m (£1.127m) from a purse of \$10m.

More of the golf later. Sport provides only one element of Smith's tale. A 2013 book, *My Secret Sister*, depicts how Smith became acquainted with a twin aged 55. "It was

extraordinary," Smith says. "She lives in Newcastle and I am in Kent so we don't see each other as much as we would like but we are in touch all the time. Since we wrote the book, a lot more has come to light. It was such a shock to Helen, she had no idea of me existing."

Smith was adopted, a fact of which she was unaware until the age of 14. "I had lost my dad when I was 12. I found out I was adopted by cousins in an argument. I was told: 'You're not part of this family and that woman downstairs is not your mother.' So that was extremely hurtful."

Through an incredible amount of research, Smith eventually met her birth mother after knocking on a door when visiting the

north-east for a wedding. Next came Helen (whom their mother had asked Smith not to alert) and the piecing together of what their precise relationship was. "It was a huge shock," Smith admits. "It was extremely cathartic writing the book but there were a lot of occasions when it was also very upsetting. What we have both been through has made us stronger."

Smith has a formidable side, then, that is not readily apparent from her cheerful disposition. By 1978, she was a founder member of the Ladies European Tour (initially the Women's Professional Golfers' Association). A sport regarded as a male-only domain and routinely discriminatory was changing shape.

"I feel very proud and honoured to have been part of that and to have been there at the very beginning," Smith says. "We would arrive for tournaments at clubs where we had no practice ground or no putting green. Often the members didn't even know they were having an event at their course. It was tough. We had a tournament in France, turned up and the prize money hadn't been sent to the bank. That was sorted but we had been sitting in a hotel, ready to play and unsure whether the tournament could even take place."

"In those days we were playing for a pittance compared to now. My first winner's cheque was in 1978, £225. I bought myself a caravan and towed it to various events, staying in that overnight. Quite a few of the girls did the same thing to cut down the costs. You weren't winning fortunes, that's for sure."

"I miss the camaraderie. When we turned pro, there was 30 of us going from place to place. We practised together, played together, ate together. They were a great bunch of girls and we all got on so well together. I miss that aspect of it and the excitement of playing."

It is more than a dozen years since Smith, now 77, has been able to hit a ball at all. An operation to mend an arthritic joint in her right hand left her unable to grip a club properly. "Rather than hack around, which would give me no pleasure at all, I packed it in," Smith says. "I have grandchildren, I have dogs, and other things take priority now. Golf has given me so much, I feel blessed for that."

Smith regards her R&A invite as a "great honour". She has taken a keen interest in how this tournament has evolved and grown. "The standard of golf really is incredible, it is amazing," Smith says. "These girls are so powerful and score so well."

"I am really excited to be going back there; it is not just 50 years since I won, but 50 years since I played the Curtis Cup at Lytham."

The US defeated Smith's Great Britain & Ireland team on that occasion. The GB&I contingent from 1986, which surprisingly triumphed in Kansas, will reunite at Lytham on Friday. Another endearing glance towards the past. Smith is fully entitled to enjoy her own as a sporting pioneer.

'He's back' Zidane makes long-awaited homecoming as France coach

The former midfielder and 1998 World Cup hero says taking over from Didier Deschamps is 'immense joy'

Raphaël Jucobin
Paris

For yesterday's front page, L'Équipe simply went with "Il revient" - "He's back" - echoing the newspaper's 2005 headline when Zinedine Zidane came out of international retirement. At the time, the midfielder's upcoming return was seen as a major boost to Les Bleus' ailing World Cup qualifying campaign. There was a similar sense of anticipation now as the roads around the French Football Federation headquarters in Paris were closed off for Zidane's unveiling as head coach. A crowd of France fans had gathered outside by the overground Métro tracks with flags, flares and drums, as more than a hundred journalists and TV cameras were ushered into the building.

The fact that Zidane would be next in line to lead France after Didier Deschamps had been an open secret for several years and by the end of the World Cup his arrival was all but confirmed. The new head coach entered the press conference room yesterday



▲ Zinedine Zidane is 'ready for the challenge' of coaching Les Bleus
ABDUL SABOOR/REUTERS

morning only minutes after his appointment was confirmed by the FFF's executive committee, but the feeling in France was that the occasion was a couple of decades in the making.

"It's a new cycle," the FFF president, Philippe Diallo, said after a preamble in which he paid tribute to Deschamps' 14-year tenure. Talks with the 1998 World Cup hero, Diallo said, began in February 2025, the month after Deschamps announced he would step down this summer. "Zinedine Zidane is one of the legends of French football and he had made it known that it

was one of his dreams to manage the French national team," Diallo said. "We wanted someone with the aura, the ability, and the hearts of our fans and the French people to manage what is one of the best national teams in the world."

For Zidane, this announcement was the culmination of nearly half a decade of waiting in the wings. "I had several offers from clubs in the last four to five years, but I turned them all down for France," the former Real Madrid manager said. "The national team is the only thing I wanted. I've been with the French teams since I was a kid, all the way up to the senior team. I'm a bit emotional. You might not be able to tell, but I am incredibly excited."

Zidane declared it was the greatest day of his managerial career. "It's an immense joy. I am ready for the challenge."

The five years that have passed since the end of Zidane's second spell in Madrid will have been spent preparing to take over Les Bleus. "I've been watching France as a supporter, but also as a future manager. I don't think there are any traps. It's new to me,

'The national team is the only thing I wanted. I'm a bit emotional and I'm incredibly excited'

but I'm not scared. This is what I wanted." The 54-year-old's first public appearance as head coach was light on the details of his plans for the national team. He notably sidestepped a question about whether Kylian Mbappé would retain the armband, insisting that he would have to meet the team and its "extraordinary players" first of all. "We need to keep this team winning," he said, adding that he was impressed with what he had seen during the World Cup.

"I was a No 10 in my playing days," he said when asked about the style of play he would look to implement. Whether his answer implies a continuation of Deschamps' attacking shift remains to be seen, but his answers did hint at some kind of change of direction. "Laurent [Blanc] was Laurent, Didier was Didier, and Zizou is Zizou," he said playfully.

One of Zidane's long-term objectives will be to compete with the reigning world champions, who have now beaten France in three consecutive tournament semi-finals. "I spent 25 years in Spain and you know what that means," he said, before pointing out that the task ahead went beyond beating La Roja. "I know Spanish football very well, but they won't be the only opponents."

Zidane's four-year contract will begin next month, with his extended staff to be unveiled a few weeks before the first internationals of the new season. "We'll see each other again in September to talk about it. It's a good thing that we'll have three weeks with the players." The focus for now, Zidane said, is on his first match in charge, which will be in Turkey on 25 September.

His homecoming, meanwhile, will be against Italy, just over 20 years after his dramatic exit from the international stage. If the raucous reception as he stepped out of the FFF headquarters is anything to go by, it will be one of the more memorable evenings in the Stade de France's history.

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'I was delighted - Iraola is the perfect fit for Liverpool'

Milos Kerkez on being reunited with former coach and the shock way he found out about Slot's sacking

Andy Hunter
New York

It has been quite the summer for Milos Kerkez. There was time at home in Serbia, holidays in Montenegro and Spain, a frantic knock on his bedroom door one day to tell him that Arne Slot had been sacked, an unexpected reunion with Andoni Iraola shortly afterwards, and thousands of well-wishes sent his way after being photographed escorting a bride into church in his hometown of Vrbas. Congratulations on the wedding are also extended at the start of our interview on a rooftop terrace at Liverpool's team hotel.

"No! This is wrong, everyone gets this wrong!" the full-back exclaims. "It was my oldest brother. In Serbia it is normal for the younger brothers to take the bride to the church. That's what I did and now everyone thinks I got married. It was Rade, not me. There are three of us - Rade is the oldest, I'm the youngest and Marko is the middle one. I keep having to explain to people that I never got married. I was going around the club when we started back and people were congratulating me. I'm like: 'No, I'm not ready for this yet!'"

Well, that's one way of breaking the ice with an interviewee. Marriage is categorically not on the agenda for Kerkez, a humorous and engaging force of energy, but he is ready to embrace other responsibilities: notably stepping out of Andy Robertson's shadow and stepping up at Liverpool.



▲ Andoni Iraola is 'intense and he likes details', says Milos Kerkez

Early days, of course, but it has been noted during Liverpool's pre-season training camp at Chicago Fire's performance centre how the 22-year-old and his fellow Hungary international Dominik Szoboszlai have taken a leading role among a relatively young squad.

Kerkez - who was eligible to play for Hungary through his paternal grandparents - is in an advantageous position as the Iraola era begins with gruelling double training sessions and a pre-season friendly win over Sunderland in Nashville on Saturday. He knows the new boss better than any other Liverpool player, having matured into a £40m left-back during two seasons with Iraola at Bournemouth. He knows he doesn't have to win over the new head coach as Iraola rates him highly. And he knows that, to convince Liverpool fans after a difficult debut season at Anfield, he is now working for a coach who can bring the best out of him.

"I was delighted, honestly," Kerkez says on discovering Liverpool's choice to replace Slot. "He helped me and improved me a lot in the two years I spent with him. I was really happy, obviously for myself but also for the team. Everyone knows what type of football he plays so I think he is the perfect fit for us."

"It's the intensity. He's not scared to play one-on-one all over the pitch, to press high and to be on the front foot always. If you see footage of how we all are after training, all lying down, then you can see what he is preparing us for. You definitely need legs and good condition for what he wants us to do, but we will be all right. When we play games with three or four teams he calls it 'consequences' and the losing team and the team that finishes second has to run. How much you have to run depends on what he decides in that moment, but there is always running for the team that loses."

"He's intense and he likes details. He's very professional. He likes to talk sometimes but not a lot. I think maybe he doesn't want to get too close to some players and wants to show that everyone is the same in the team, so he doesn't want to get too close to anyone in particular."

Milos Kerkez played 48 games for Liverpool last season



He keeps it professional, with a lot of hard work."

There were times last season when Kerkez appeared inhibited by Slot's insistence on building from the back and full-backs coming inside. It was his pace and energy up and down the flank with Bournemouth that had attracted Liverpool and earned him a place in the Professional Footballers' Association's team of the year in 2024-25. He should be able to play to his strengths more often next season.

As he explains: "The gaffer likes to play more with the full-backs

down the line, underlapping, overlapping. It worked well for me at Bournemouth, so I think it will also work well for me here. He always told me that defending is really important, for him that is first of all, and because you are a full-back you need to defend really hard. Everything you can do in front of you is like a bonus. So I was always focused first on defending and then running forward to help the wingers. He showed me that when you do your job then you are free to do what you want, so I felt really free with him. He lets you be more free to do your stuff."

Not that Kerkez blames Slot for last season's turbulence, far from it. The pair remain in contact. "I was surprised," he says of the Dutchman's sacking, 12 months after delivering the Premier League title. "I really didn't know. I was back in Serbia, I was sleeping and my brother woke me up. He knocks on my door and it was a big surprise. Nobody knew. I couldn't believe it, I was like: 'Wow.' I have been in touch with him since, we have exchanged a few messages."

Kerkez admits last season was "tough for everyone" at Liverpool as every time the team seemed to have solved one problem, another would

I grew up a bit different in Serbia ... I started to drive a truck when I was 10 years old'

appear. As part of the expensive recruitment drive of last summer that failed to bear fruit – though Kerkez achieved far more than others – the scrutiny on the left-back and his fellow new signings was particularly intense. He insists he did not feel it.

“Honestly, I don’t care about pressure,” says the full-back, who will face Wrexham in the second game of Liverpool’s US tour in New York today. “I don’t like ‘pressure’ and that stuff. I grew up a bit different in Serbia. We grew up different. You could say maybe we are built a bit different. For example, I started to drive a truck when I was 10 years old.” Sorry? “It was with my dad,” Kerkez says. “I climbed in and then I took the wheel. He was doing the pedals, I was only quite small so I couldn’t reach them.”

Kerkez’s father, Sebastijan, still drives his son to Liverpool’s training centre on occasions. He and Kerkez’s mother, Tijana, moved to England to help their second son settle into life as a Premier League player. “They are very important,” says the defender. “My brothers have their own lives now but my parents are with me and I am much happier they are with me. My dad is here to smack me sometimes on the top of the head and to remind me. Sometimes you play a few good games and maybe you start to get a bit carried away. But my dad is here to smack me. I come straight back down and I switch straight back on.”

Another important influence on Kerkez has been Robertson, the man – and the Liverpool legend – he was bought to replace. The Scotland captain and now Tottenham left-back regularly took Kerkez aside last season to pass on his experience. But there was no big parting message when the time came for Robertson to say goodbye to Anfield in May.

“I didn’t want to get a lot on to him,” says Kerkez, who became close friends with Mohamed Salah last season. “He was a bit emotional as everything was coming to an end. I didn’t want to get on to him too much, but throughout the year he helped me. We had a few conversations about crosses and about the big lungs we need to have so we can run until tomorrow. He did a lot of seasons, I should also have the same. We had conversations like that. Also, where to put the last ball, to focus, to put your head up and sometimes put better crosses in.”

“We all know what Andy did for the club. I’m not running away from that. I want to make my own way. I’m going to work hard. I know what it means to play for Liverpool. I showed it a bit last year and I am going to show it more this year. Before we left the Axa [Liverpool’s training ground, to come to Chicago] I saw on TV a show about how many goals and assists Mo had, it was something like 380. I just walked out! ‘What is this?’ I was thinking. Time flies. A new generation comes and hopefully everything will be good.”

Is World Cup for sale?

The lowdown on Fifa’s plans and next stages

Gianni Infantino is under fire from Uefa over plans to sell off commercial rights for the event but claims they are ‘about the democratisation of football’, says **Paul MacInnes**

What is Fifa up to now?

A week after the World Cup finished, Fifa has yet to announce whether Argentina will be punished for the violence seen on the pitch at the end of the final. What it has been able to do, however, is devise an entirely new way of running international football, which – in the words of its president, Gianni Infantino – “is about the democratisation of football worldwide”. It is also an idea to allow private investors to take a stake in Fifa’s competitions and potentially make money from the World Cup.

So how will this idea work?

After reporting in the Times and the Financial Times broke the news yesterday afternoon, Fifa published a lengthy statement

extolling the new venture. To be known as Fifa Forward Enterprise, or FFE, the new body would sell all of Fifa’s commercial rights – across broadcast, sponsorship, ticketing and licensing – and also take charge of “operational delivery” of Fifa tournaments. It would focus all Fifa’s money-making endeavours in one place and the governing body would “retain sole control of FFE”, but it would also “invite third parties to make minority, non-controlling investments”. These investors “would be selected against clear long-term, governance, and strategic criteria”.

Is Fifa selling off the game?

Well, a small “non-controlling” bit of it. But whose game is it anyway? And yes, Fifa confirmed to the Times that the proposed lead investor to take a stake in FFE would be Joshua Kushner, the brother of Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared, but why should that matter? As Infantino pointed out on his 15-slide Instagram post on Monday, Fifa has been “on the front lines organising, working hard, and delivering the best show in the world”. Maybe give Fifa a break?

Surely Fifa’s member associations won’t be happy?

Sources have told the Guardian that the FFE plans would not allow investors to take dividends from the scheme (though the investors could later sell their stake). The governing body’s messaging, meanwhile, is very much focused on the financial benefits the scheme would bring to its member associations. Fifa has promised that any external investment would deliver an “optional” \$20m in extra funding to any nation that wants it. It has also promised an increase in annual disbursements and predicted a total of \$10bn in extra funding would eventually be shared around. Fifa has said that a majority of its 211 members must express an interest in taking the extra funding if the external investment is to be allowed. Many nations are already dependent on Fifa in order to run their operations, however, and this year Infantino said that without the governing body “there would be no football in 150 countries in the world”. So he would seem likely to receive the necessary expressions of interest.

Third-party investors would be selected against ‘long-term governance and strategic criteria’

Infantino has previous in this regard, does he not?

Yes, he announced a deal with the Japanese investment management firm Softbank to fund development of the Club World Cup in 2018 until a backlash brought it down. Reports in the Times suggested that he could become chief executive of the FFE once he leaves Fifa – he is poised to win an unprecedented fourth term next year which would extend his stay until 2031. Fifa also insists joint ventures are par for the course – Uefa has one such with the group known as European Football Clubs to sell the commercial rights to its competitions. Fifa said: “Many major sporting organisations have restructured their commercial operations in similar ways in recent years in pursuit of the same long-term goal – sustainable growth that can be reinvested in the sport itself.”

So what happens now?

The Guardian reported yesterday that the launch of the FFE – which has been planned since well before the World Cup – has caught the rest of football by surprise. Members of the key decision-making body, the Fifa council, were unaware of the scheme. Uefa, meanwhile, has released its second statement in a month warning of a Rubicon being crossed. There will probably be further expressions of discontent and questions will be asked as to the process that led to these events. But whether any football stakeholder will do anything to stop the plans is uncertain.

Burnham says: ‘Once you have sold a piece of it, you’ve sold out’

Continued from back page

European governing body accusing Fifa of attempting to sell the soul of football. “This crosses a line that football’s governing institutions should never cross,” Uefa said of the FFE plan.

“Uefa takes it extremely seriously. So should every national association. So should every stakeholder: leagues, clubs, players, supporters, governments and everyone who cares about

the game. The soul and governance of football are not assets to trade – especially with zero transparency as to who gains. None of us are the owners of football. It is not Fifa’s to sell.”

Burnham, an Everton fan, posted on social media: “Football does not belong to investors. It belongs to the people who fill the stands and who stand on the touchline week in, week out, rain or shine. The World Cup is not a product. It is the greatest competition in world sport, and it was never anyone’s to sell. Dress the deal up however you like. Once you have sold a piece of it, you have sold out.”

Infantino kept Fifa’s plans under wraps until reports emerged in the Times and Financial Times. Fifa council members are understood to have been surprised by the announcement, having been sidelined from the decision-making process.

Football In brief



DayannMethalie is poised to sign for Sunderland

Sunderland

Black Cats poised to sign Newcastle target

Sunderland are poised to sign the long-time Newcastle target Dayann Methalie from Toulouse. The France Under-21s defender, who can play left-back or wingback and also operate in the centre, has attracted widespread interest this summer but Régis Le Bris now appears close to acquiring him for about £26m. Newcastle had extensively scouted Methalie, who made 27 Ligue 1 appearances for Toulouse last season, and reportedly tried to sign him in

January. The club have now indicated they opted against the idea of recruiting the 20-year-old and have not submitted a bid this summer. Nonetheless, Methalie appeared an ideal fit for Newcastle’s new transfer policy of recruiting young players in the £20m-£40m price bracket.

Louise Taylor

Fifa insisted it would retain responsibility for governance and the international match calendar, but in reality inviting private investment in its commercial rights would subject

the decision makers to significant external pressures. Investors could be given significant influence over decisions that affect the entire sport, leading to fears they would seek to stage the World Cup more regularly and permit it to be hosted in only the most lucrative markets, such as the US. Fifa said it would “carefully select long-term investors who will purchase minority, non-controlling interests in FFE – all net benefits will be reinvested back into football”.

Italy

Mancini to lead national team for second time

Roberto Mancini has agreed to be Italy head coach for a second time, the president of the Italian Football

Federation (FIGC), Giovanni Malagò said yesterday, also confirming Claudio Ranieri would take over as technical director. Mancini replaces Gennaro Gattuso, who left the post in April after Italy failed to qualify for a third World Cup in succession, and returns to a job he held between 2018 and 2023. The former FIGC technical director Paolo Maldini and his adviser, Leonardo, resigned from their roles on Monday after Andrea Pirlo’s appointment as head coach was blocked because of the former midfielder’s ties to a Russian betting firm. Pep Guardiola was the first choice but turned down the job last month. **Reuters**

Infantino is expected to be re-elected unopposed as president next year despite the huge controversy he attracts, but under Fifa statutes must stand down in 2031 after serving three full terms. The Times reported, however, that Infantino has aspirations to serve as chair of FFE, which could earn him tens of millions of dollars.

Hunt settles for silver as Hobbs storms to 100m gold in race of her life

Eseme wins men's race on sodden Glasgow track as heavy rain causes havoc

Sean Ingle
Scotstoun Stadium

On a night of spite and might in Glasgow, England's Amy Hunt had to settle for 100m silver as New Zealand's Zoe Hobbs ran the race of her life to take Commonwealth gold.

The filth and unrelenting fury of the rain had left the track sodden and conditions far from ideal, but Hobbs ran a huge personal best of 10.93sec from lane seven to take a surprise victory, with Hunt second in 10.98. Australia's Torrie Lewis ran an Australia record of 10.99 to claim bronze.

True, this was nowhere near as deep a final as it could have been. Six of the 10 fastest 100m women this year come from the Commonwealth. None of them were taking to the blocks when the gun went off

at 9.40pm. But that won't bother Hobbs, who produced a sensational run to take victory.

Earlier, Cameroon's Emmanuel Eseme defied Australia's Lachlan Kennedy in the final strides to take gold in the men's 100m.

For 95 metres of the race, Kennedy ran a stormer. But moments before the line he stuttered slightly, as Eseme charged from third to first to come through in a Commonwealth Games record of 9.83sec. For Kennedy there was a compensation of a silver medal and an Australian record of 9.85. Nigeria's Kanyinsola Ajayi took bronze in 9.90, and Wales's Jeremiah Azu was fifth in 10.03.

There was another gold for Australia minutes earlier as Ky Robinson sprinted clear to win 10,000m gold in 27min 48.93sec, ahead of India's Gulveer Singh. Not far behind was the Isle of Man's David Mullarkey, who won bronze – and his island's first track and field medal at a Commonwealth Games.

But this day will live longest in the

memory for the rain, which flitted from the heavy to the biblical and never really eased. The high jumpers looked particularly miserable when they were introduced to the crowd shortly before 6.30pm. No wonder, given the weather in Glasgow bore a closer resemblance to late October than the height of summer.

As the rain hammered down, some high jumpers sported umbrellas in between jumps. Others winter coats. The Indian Pooja Singh, the 19-year-old Asian champion, took even fewer chances. She wore a thick coat, a woolly hat and gloves.

Outside the stadium, the volunteers were joyously shouting: "No Scotland, no party" but – for the first time at these Games – no one was joining in. Unsurprisingly it was the field events that were affected most of all, with officials fighting a largely losing battle with their huge squeegee rollers designed to suck up water from the infield.

Eventually the women's high jump was halted for nearly 90 minutes after the conditions turned for the worse. And while the women's hammer did start on time, the wet weather affected some athletes' grip.

The first thrower in the competition, Scotland's Angela McAuslan-Kelly, found the protective net. So did Australia's Stephanie Ratcliffe, who went second. No wonder there were ironic cheers when the third competitor to throw, England's Charlotte Payne, found the field.

Things were better in the sprints, at least, with the new lightning fast Mondo track at the Scotstoun Stadium producing several very fast 100m semi-final times. Eseme was quickest to make the final in 9.89, with Kennedy running a lifetime best of 9.94 behind him.

However those in lanes one, two,



▲ Cameroon's Emmanuel Eseme comes through to beat Australia's Lachlan Kennedy by 0.02 seconds
ANDY BUCHANAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and three in those semi-finals found themselves disadvantaged as their lanes were unprotected by the stadium roof – and so had to run through surface water.

England's Elliot Jones seemed to be affected most of all as he bombed out after running 10.24 – nearly two-tenths slower than his time in the heat.

"There was water all over the lane,"



▲ Summer in Scotland: the rain hammers down for the 10,000m in Glasgow
MARTIN RICKETT/PA

Jersey boy Nowacki comes of age with golden swim

Yara El-Shaboury
Tollcross Swimming Centre

Filip Nowacki secured his status as Jersey's most successful Commonwealth Games athlete by storming to a historic gold medal in the men's 200m breaststroke.

The 18-year-old led from start to finish in a commanding display, touching the wall in 2min 07.87sec before erupting in celebration as he climbed on to the lane dividers and slapped the water in delight while soaking up the enthusiastic applause

as Jersey flags waved. Canada's Oliver Dawson claimed silver, with Australia's Olympic champion, Zac Stubblety-Cook, taking bronze.

Having captured silver in the 100m breaststroke earlier in the Games, Nowacki arrived as the favourite and delivered under the weight of expectation. The Jersey teenager took control from the opening 50m, remained in front at halfway and produced a superb pull-out after the turn to extend his advantage.

By the 150m mark, Nowacki had opened up a lead of more than seven tenths of a second and never looked

in danger of surrendering it, powering home to claim Jersey's first Commonwealth swimming gold.

It was Jersey's first Commonwealth gold medal in any sport since Colin Mallett won the individual fullbore shooting title in Auckland in 1990 before teaming up with his father, Cliff, to take bronze in the pairs.

Nowacki's triumph marks another milestone in the remarkable rise of the world junior and British senior champion, who is widely viewed as the heir to the British breaststroke great Adam Ramsay-Peaty, having already finished ahead of the Olympic champion in the 100m breaststroke final in Glasgow.

England's teenage sensation Amalie Smith claimed her second medal of the Games with bronze in the women's 200m individual medley. The 16-year-old, who won silver in the 400m individual medley

on her Games debut on Monday, again impressed against an experienced international field, finishing third behind Australia's Jenna Forrester and South Africa's Aimee Canny.

Smith qualified third fastest for the final, with Forrester the quickest and the favourite for gold. The English teenager briefly hit the front during the closing stages before Forrester surged clear to win in 2min 09.24sec, with Canny securing silver.

Smith held on for bronze, adding another podium finish to an outstanding first Commonwealth Games campaign. Scotland's Katie Shanahan narrowly missed out on a medal in fourth after her fast start, while Wood was unable to challenge for the podium.

Earlier, Scotland's Stephen Clegg claimed gold in the men's S14 50m freestyle, with the five-time Paralympic medallist touching the

wall in 24.73sec to secure an impressive victory. South Africa's Nathan Hendricks finished second in 24.84, while Canada's Nicolas-Guy Turbide took bronze in 24.96. The triumph comes days after the 30-year-old won silver in the men's S13 100m freestyle, where his brother James narrowly missed the podium in fourth place.

Clegg had previously claimed silver in the same event at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, making this victory a significant milestone in his medal collection.

"This is extraordinarily special for me," Clegg said. "It's a career highlight. I don't know how to put it into words. Every time I try and find a way to express it, it feels like I'm underselling it. Not only to win a gold in Scotland, but also to hear the national anthem, is emotional beyond words. I was just trembling the entire time while on the podium."



said Jones, a part-time sprinter who works as football operations manager at Uefa. "When I got in the blocks I was pushing water out my lanes, then there was a false start and the water all came back. It's a Scottish summer, isn't it?"

Things didn't get any better when the gun went off. "It felt like I couldn't get any traction," Jones said. "I didn't feel like I was moving anywhere. It

was freezing. Then we had a false start. We had to reset, and your nervous system's up and down and up and down. It's frustrating."

Conditions had eased slightly by the time the women's high jump resumed at 9.08pm. However, conditions were far from ideal and England's Morgan Lake went out early having failed three attempts at 1.82m, her opening height.

Evans floors her rivals to banish beam frustration

Ruby Evans held the rage at bay as she capped a tumultuous Games by clinching women's floor gold for Wales on the final day of the gymnastics competition in Glasgow.

The 19-year-old had arrived in Scotland as a multiple medal contender but cut a frustrated figure after a plunge from the beam cost her any chance in the all-around competition on Sunday. Evans' individual sixth-placed finish followed Wales narrowly missing out on a team medal, and she opted to withdraw from Monday's uneven bars final to focus on her favourite discipline.

Her decision paid off as a high-risk routine earned her a score of 13.500 and eclipsed England's Abigail Martin and Shantae-Eve Amankwaah, who took silver and bronze with 13.333 and 13.300 respectively.

"I feel like coming out angry kind of helps," said Evans. "It gives you that fire and motivation to go out there and do well. But this morning I was actually quite chilled. I was surprised at my own emotions because I thought I'd be really nervous."

Evans finished seventh in the beam final earlier in the session. She added: "I knew I wanted to make the beam final because it would help get the nerves out, and I could come out feeling confident on the floor."

Luke Whitehouse followed up his gold medal in the men's floor competition on Monday by taking silver in the men's vault final behind Canada's Félix Dolci. **PA Media**

It's 'Chico' time: restaurateur takes on lawn bowls' best

Mohammed Ayub Qureshi has invited Pakistan's opponents, Australia, for dinner - whatever the result

Yara El-Shaboury
Glasgow

The invitation has already been extended. Even if Australia beat Pakistan in their men's pairs match at the Commonwealth Games, they are still welcome to dinner afterwards. There is just one small catch. "If we lose, they are still invited to the restaurant, but I will probably give them a spicy vindaloo as revenge," Mohammed Ayub Qureshi says with a smile.

Qureshi, better known around Glasgow's bowls community as "Chico", has spent decades serving food at Alishan Tandoori while also becoming Pakistan's most recognisable lawn bowler. Today the restaurateur swaps the shirt and tie for Pakistan colours as he and his teammate, Maqsood Waseem Khan, face one of the toughest assignments in the sport.

Standing across the rink will be Australia's Corey Wedlock and Aaron Teys. Wedlock is a three-time world champion after starring at the 2023 World Outdoor Championships, while Australia have already stamped their authority on these Games, leading the medal table with over 60 medals overall.

"I feel excited to be playing with the best," Qureshi says. "Hopefully we'll learn something and we'll take something home. The experience, I mean, these guys, are the creme de la creme."

Beside him sits Khan, the



▲ Mohammed Ayub Qureshi with the CEO of World Bowls, Neil Dalrymple

secretary of the Pakistan Lawn Bowls Federation, who needs no reminding of the challenge awaiting them. "These guys are serious so we know we have to be as well."

Qureshi has lived in Glasgow for decades, while Khan remains based in Pakistan, training before flying in for international competition. "We make it work, it is not that difficult," Khan says. "I play and train in Faisalabad or Lahore and he is here but it does not come to mind."

Their journeys into bowls could hardly have been more different. For Qureshi, it started almost accidentally nearly three decades ago through a relationship forged in business. "I started playing bowls nearly 30 years ago. And the reason I got into it was because our bank manager at the curry house helped. He was a bowler," Qureshi says.

"When we opened the business, we decided to do something for this club where I train, the Glasgow Indoor Bowling Club. We said to the manager: 'We'd like to sponsor

'Being an athlete gets you away from the public in a sense. You go on the green and play at leisure'

your club for the tournaments you hold every year.' So for the last 30 years, we've been sponsoring them with three-course meals every year, trophies and prizes. Then I decided to join the club and play."

Khan's introduction to the sport required a bit more improvisation. "I was impressed by the bowls but I couldn't buy bowling balls in Pakistan," he says. "They never even heard of the sport. I got the balls to be made out of wood."

Cricket remains the country's overwhelming sporting obsession. Bowls, by contrast, is still fighting for recognition, facilities and even equipment. But Khan has made it his mission to change that. "I train young people in Faisalabad and in Lahore. Mostly young people are interested in bowls in Pakistan now. Pakistan is known for their love of cricket. Bowls is a sport of luxury. But I try to help them financially and try to get them interested. I am trying to create an academy which can provide easy access. Pakistan is my home and I want to bring my love there."

Home, meanwhile, is a complicated concept for Qureshi. Born in Multan, he has spent more than 50 years living in Glasgow. He represents Pakistan but is cheered on by Scottish clubmates, loyal customers and friends. "My indoor club and the outdoor club and my customers, they all come and support me," he says. "I see them in the crowd and sometimes I will give them a free poppadom in return."

Running a successful restaurant and competing internationally might sound exhausting but Qureshi insists they complement one another. "Running a restaurant for 30 years, you get adjusted to it, you find a good staff who would cover you. Being a restaurateur gives me an income. Being an athlete gets you away from the public in a sense. You go on the green, relaxed, and just play balls at your leisure."

"Stressful days would be against the big teams. Like tomorrow. Your mind is always wondering what to do, what shot to play, all that sort of stuff. I mean, we're kind of part-time club players becoming internationalists. It's an amazing feeling. It's a feeling you can't describe."

Results

Football

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Second qualifying round: Second leg Celje L Egnatia Rrogzshine L (agg 3-3); Dinamo Zagreb 3 Thun 2 (aet; agg 4-3); Hearts 0 Sturm Graz 2 (agg 0-6); KuPS 0 Sabah 2 (agg 0-3); Lincoln Red Imps 0 Mjallby 0 (agg 0-3); Shamrock L Ararat-Armenia L (agg 0-2)

CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Second qualifying round: Second leg Apollon 3 Dila 0 (agg 7-0); CSKA 1948 Sofia 0 Spartak Trnava 0 (aet; agg 0-0); CSKA 1948 Sofia won 5-3 on pens; Drita 2 Floriana 1 (aet; agg 3-2); Riga 5 Vardar Skopje 2 (aet; agg 8-4)

Commonwealth Games

SWIMMING

Men: 100m Freestyle: Final: 1 F Southam (Aus) 47.13; 2 M Richards (Wal) 47.64; 3 K Chalmers (Aus) 47.74
400m Individual Medley: Final: 1 L Claret (NZ) 4:08.72; 2 W Petric (Aus) 4:11.02; 3 L Wigginton (Can) 4:11.38

200m Breaststroke: Final: 1 F Nowacki (Jer) 2:07.87; 2 O Dawson (Can) 2:08.39; 3 Z Stubblety-Cook (Aus) 2:08.91
Women: 200m Individual Medley: Final: 1 J Forrester (Aus) 2:09.24; 2 A Canny (SA) 2:09.37; 3 A Smith (Eng) 2:09.61

50m Backstroke: Final: 1 K Masse (Can) 27.32; 2 IA Anderson (Aus) 27.45; 3 L Cox (Eng) 27.56
50m Breaststroke: Final: 1 L van Niekerk (SA) 30.43; 2 S Toohy (Aus) 30.54; 3 I Clark (Eng) 30.86

ATHLETICS

Men: 10,000m: Final: 1 K Robinson (Aus) 27:48.93; 2 G Singh (Ind) 27:49.78; 3 D Mullarkey (IoM) 27:50.28

Cricket

FIRST MEN'S TEST (fourth day of five)

Tarouba West Indies 311 (SD Hope 92, KAR Hodge 84; Mohammad Ali 4-50) & 181 (Mohammad Abbas 5-22). Pakistan 282 (Shan Masood 109, Imam-ul-Haq 63; JP Greaves 5-27) & 120 (Babar Azam 58 no; JNT Seales 5-20). West Indies beat Pakistan by 90 runs.

THIRD WOMEN'S ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL

Hambantota Pakistan 187. Sri Lanka 191-2 (HMD Samarawickrama 71, AMCJK Athapaththu 52, GWHM Perera 50). Sri Lanka beat Pakistan by eight wickets.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Headingley Sunrisers Leeds 142-4. Manchester Super Giants 147-6 (SS Mandhana 88). Manchester Super Giants beat Sunrisers Leeds by four wickets.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Headingley Manchester Super Giants 181-3 (JC Buttler 63 no, H Klaasen 53). Sunrisers Leeds 186-2 (MR Marsh 63, Z Crawley 56 no). Sunrisers Leeds beat Manchester Super Giants by eight wickets.

METRO BANK ONE DAY CUP MEN

Group A Trent Bridge Leicestershire 199 (SS Eskinazi 93 no; JA Pocklington 4-40). Nottinghamshire 200-5 (BJR Martindale 50). Nottinghamshire beat Leicestershire by five wickets.

Farington Kent 223 (DJ Bell-Drummond 56). Lancashire 227-4 (MF Hurst 55). Lancashire beat Kent by six wickets.

Snooker

SHANGHAI MASTERS (China)

First round: 1 Lisowski (Eng) bt Zhang A (Chn) 6-4; Si J (Chn) bt Pang J (Chn) 6-4

Second round: M Williams (Wal) bt C Wakelin (Eng) 6-5; N Robertson (Aus) bt Xiao G (Chn) 6-5; J Trump (Eng) bt B Hawkins (Eng) 6-4; K Wilson (Eng) bt R O'Sullivan (Eng) 6-4

Fixtures

Football

Champions League

Second qualifying round: Second leg Gornik Zabrze (0) v Fenerbahce (1) (7pm); Hapoel Be'er Sheva (1) v Vikingur Reykjavik (2) (6.30pm); Kairat (0) v Omonia Nicosia (1) (4pm); Kauno Zalgiris (0) v KI (0) (5pm); Lech Poznan (4) v AGF (1) (6pm); Red Star Belgrade (4) v Larne (0) (7pm); Slovan Bratislava (2) v Iberia 1999 (0) (7.15pm); Universitatea Craiova (0) v Levski Sofia (1) (6.30pm)

Conference League

Second qualifying round: Second leg Copenhagen (3) v Polissya (3) (6pm); Dukagjini (0) v Lugano (1) (3.30pm); Rapid Vienna (3) v Santa Coloma (1) (7.30pm)

Cricket

The Hundred Women

MI London v London Spirit, The Kia Oval (3pm); Welsh Fire v Trent Rockets, Sophia Gardens (11.30am)

The Hundred Men

MI London v London Spirit, The Kia Oval (6.30pm); Welsh Fire v Trent Rockets, Sophia Gardens (3pm)

Metro Bank One Day Cup Men

Group A Warks v Surrey, Edgbaston (11am). **Group B** Durham v Glamorgan, Gosforth (11am); Sussex v Essex, Arundel (11am); Yorkshire v Worcestershire, York (11am)

Trailblazer

The remarkable story of the first Women's Open champion



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Zidane's back
'The national team is the only thing I really wanted'

Page 39 →



The Guardian
Wednesday
29 July
2026



Sport

Eseme makes splash with Games record

Full 100m final report
Page 42 →



In a storming finish in the rain, Cameroon's Emmanuel Eseme won gold in the 100m
BEN STANSALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Discriminatory chanting at football games on the rise

Paul MacInnes

Abusive chanting against immigrants has become a feature of football matches in England, according to new data from Kick It Out.

Last season, 39 reports of anti-immigrant chanting were made to the anti-discrimination charity, more than the previous two seasons combined. Phrases such as "stop the boats" and "send them back" were reported as being heard "at all levels of the game", as part of a growing trend of discriminatory "mass chanting" at games, Kick It Out said.

The growth in anti-immigrant rhetoric was consistent with a broader rise in reports of discrimination, at matches and online. Kick It Out received 1,744 reports of discriminatory behaviour in total during 2025-26, a record, and a 25% increase on the previous campaign.

The number of reported incidents increased across every type of discrimination to new highs. Reports of racism remained the most common, rising 19% year on year, the 792 reports making up 45% of the total. Complaints of sexist behaviour rose 12% to 216, homophobia rose 46% to 203, antisemitism rose 43% to 93, ableism rose 20% to 89, and Islamophobia rose 88% to 60.

Samuel Okafor, chief executive at Kick It Out, said such behaviour at matches and in online spaces was matched by a rise in hateful rhetoric elsewhere in British society, but he praised the willingness of supporters - and players - to speak out.

"Discrimination remains deeply embedded across the game at a time when we're also seeing rises in hate crime and divisive political rhetoric," he said. "But they also show that people are more willing to stand up to abuse when they see it, and it's encouraging to see professional players set that example last season."

In March a 60-year-old man was given a suspended sentence for sending offensive messages to the England Women defender Jess Carter. In the men's game, Antoine Semenyo drew attention to the racist abuse he had received.

Okafor said: "We will continue to work with football authorities, clubs, leagues, regulators and government to ensure we match the courage shown to report abuse with clear and consistent action so that football is welcoming to everyone."

'Selling the soul of football'

Fifa faces backlash over \$20bn proposal for World Cup rights

Matt Hughes
Paul MacInnes

Fifa has announced plans to sell the commercial rights to its tournaments, including the World Cup, to private investors, triggering an immediate backlash from Uefa, leading European clubs and politicians.

Uefa released a statement accusing Fifa of "attempting to sell the soul of football" and is believed to be considering its legal position, while sources at numerous elite clubs



The Fifa president, Gianni Infantino, is looking to cash in on football's popularity*

were highly critical of the proposal in private. Andy Burnham, the prime minister, condemned the move.

Fifa has confirmed it is working with the US bank JP Morgan on setting up a new entity - to be called Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE) - that would raise hundreds of millions by selling a stake in the commercial rights of the men's and women's World Cups, and the Club World Cup to investors, with promises of an increase in distribution of "over \$10bn" (£7.5bn) then being redistributed back to Fifa's 211 member associations. Thrive Capital,

an investment company founded by Joshua Kushner - brother of Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner - is leading the search for investors.

Gianni Infantino, the Fifa president, said the plan would lead to "the commercial side of the game [operating] as a focused, dedicated business, with its value shared more and better all around the world". The plans are subject to approval by a "majority" of member associations, but Fifa declined to comment when asked when a vote will take place.

Sources with knowledge of Fifa's proposals said it is valuing the new venture at about \$20bn, with Infantino looking to cash in on football's growing global popularity after the World Cup. The Guardian revealed this month that Fifa's revenues for the tournament would exceed \$15bn, a significant increase on the projected figure of \$13bn, with such growth appearing to embolden Infantino.

The revelation of the plans provoked an immediate backlash from Uefa, with the